Tattwa are the words of the world:
Balinese narratives and creative transformation

by

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Abstract

In Balinese, a distinction is made between different types of stories. While fiction, unsourced mythological tales and hearsay stories are known as satua, there are a specific group of cultural narratives, carrying a different set of meanings altogether, which are identified as tattwa. Stories described as tattwa do something that goes beyond providing information, entertainment, or instruction (even though they may also do any or all of these things.)

This thesis is about what tattwa narratives are and what they do. What is it that makes tattwa narratives different from other stories? How do tattwa narratives enliven the past in the present; engender intimate encounters with elements of the world which can’t be seen; and produce real effects on bodies and in the world today?

The thesis combines ethnographic research and creative writing, and takes shape through two distinct forms, a Dissertation and a Screenplay. While structurally different, both of these projects share an abiding preoccupation: how best to model the efficacy of tattwa? How might emulating particular Balinese narrative devices, such as juxtaposing different types of stories and storytelling styles, serve to not only portray but to enact the potency of tattwa as lived cultural knowledge?
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Dedication

In memory of Ni Nyoman Gedong, who began by telling me stories.

And to my beloved children, Wayan Astari and Made Jatayu,

for whom these stories are intended.
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my great appreciation to all members of my family in both Bali and Australia who have contributed, both directly and indirectly, towards the completion of this thesis.

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Authorisation

This thesis is based on research carried out in Bali in consultation with Mangku Penyarikan I Made Sedana, who is a teaching balian (practitioner of traditional knowledges) and mangku (temple priest, ceremonial official). The title Mangku Penyarikan refers to his position of seniority within a particular system of knowledge and education traditions which I will refer to further below. Made Sedana, or Pak De¹, as I call him, is the maternal uncle of my husband, Nyoman, and he counts both Nyoman and me among his ‘children’. Both Pak De’s position, and my familial relationship to him have been of paramount importance to my research in Bali and to this thesis, as I will discuss.

Pak Mangku Sedana authorises my work

¹ Bapak or Pak is the Indonesian term for father and uncle and a general respectful term of address for men. Equivalent Balinese terms are Bapa (Pa) or Nanang (Nang) but Pak is also used widely as a term of address in Bali. Non-family address Pak De more formally using terms such as Jero Mangku or Mangku Penyarikan.
At the end of my first period of formal fieldwork with Pak De, and before my return to Australia, I went to his home to take my leave and to thank him for all the time he had spent with me and all that he had taught me. In turn, he asked me to photograph the cover and two pages of one of his note books and include them in all work I produce based on my research with him.
These three pages were taken from a notebook into which Pak De had copied the contents of an ancient lontar (palm leaf manuscript) called Lontar Kakek Tua Babad Kundalini Bad 1 when he was first studying it. He did this to keep track of what he was learning and so he
could access the knowledge contained in this key *lontar* whenever he wished, without having to hold the special ceremonies that are generally required before taking *lontar* down from their place of storage to read\(^2\).

The reason I put it in a book was so that I would know in this year I did this, in this year this, then in this year this. For example, this book reminds me that on the first day of the second month - this is the figure two in Balinese - nineteen hundred and seventy one, I wrote this book, based on that knowledge. So I have written this belongs to I Made Sedana, Beraban, Batu Ngang\(^3\) (Sedana 1201074).

In giving me these pages, Pak De did not translate or explain their contents in any detail. While he did discuss aspects of them at other times in relation to his work as a *balian*, their contents are not discussed in detail here because it is not what they say that is of primary significance here. Rather, it is my possession of these pages and their inclusion in my work that authorises me to refer to Pak De’s stories and teachings, and to transcribe, translate and make use of the *lontar*-based narratives that appear in and inform this thesis. As well as properly referencing the *lontar* concerned, these pages attest to my own family ties, as Pak De insisted.

You need to include these three pages written by Kaki Tua, who was Dalem Tohlangkir\(^5\). Dalem Tohlangkir means the first Ancestor to come down, whose name was Dalem Nguni. If you don’t include these then you don’t know how the story really goes. If you read that story anywhere then this is where it comes from.

The term *tingkah*\(^6\) used by Balinese means after we think, then we speak, then after we speak we act, we act and we immediately do something. We do something based on consideration, that’s what it means. If you just go from below not from the beginning then there is not that movement of action. For instance,

\(^2\) Rubinstein (2000) discusses the ceremonies required to access *lontar* in detail.

\(^3\) Batu Ngang is a pseudonym for Pak De’s *banjar* in Beraban, Tabanan.

\(^4\) References to Sedana refer to personal discussion with Pak De Sedana and the date on which they were recorded. This referencing system is explained further in Chapter 1.

\(^5\) Tohlangkir means the highest. *Dalem Tohlangkir* refers to the Demigod who descended to earth and became the first *Dalem* or ruler of Bali.

\(^6\) Tingkah means action, behaviour.
what sets the machine in motion? In this case, what sets people in motion? That’s what this is about, that is why this script is called Aksara Kawitan (Ancestral Script). Aksara Kawitan means it is especially for the family.

I will tell you about this aksara (written character, letter, word, writing, script). This is the oldest aksara and it says, ‘I was the first one in this world’. Pati raga means there are no other humans on the face of this earth, there is only me alone. He was called Hyang Bhatara⁷ and he was the only human on this earth. That’s why this place was called Pulau Dewata (Island of the Gods⁸), because only the Gods could come here, because it was like a buoy, floating here and there, sailing around like a boat, this land. Then after the land was still, there were these aksara (characters) that you have photographed.

After these aksara were mastered, Dalem Tohlangkir was given God’s blessing to rule the earth. He became the guardian of the earth - the underworld, this world, and the world above.

That’s why I say you have to take photos of these three pages, because if you just read them you won’t remember them for long. … This is called Aksara Kawitan (Ancestral script), or Pusaka Kawitan (Ancestral texts and objects). If you include these, Anna, then that shows that you are a descendant of that Ancestor or one of my descendants. If these aren’t included then it means it has been taken from me but not by a descendant. If someone is just studying with me, then they won’t include these three pages. These pages give you permission, for example, if you want to publish something then you are authorised to do so. If you don’t include these then you are allowed to study but you are not allowed to publish anything. So you have to take these three pages, even though they are just in your camera. If I had the time I would have copied them out for you. Perhaps I will do that next time, so that you have something to take with you, showing that this has been handed down by Dalem Tohlangkir.

⁷ Hyang Bhatara is a title given to a God or Deity.
⁸ The Balinese (and Indonesian) word Dewa/ Dewata is an ungendered terms for God/s, although sometimes the term Dewa-Dewi is used to indicate Gods and Goddesses. In this thesis, all general references to Gods, Deities, or Dewa/Dewata indicate both male and female Gods. I have used the term Goddess when a specific female God has been indicated.
This is so you don’t do things half-way, and you know how things were done in this family in the past. Later if you want to learn about what we call ‘hearsay’ or what Balinese call *kocap* or *kone* for then you can do so directly. You can go to Tanah Lot, and see things and ask, what does this mean? You could go with Komang or with Ketut. There you will hear the folk stories - Oh, they say that it was like this, they say that it was like that, this God and that God. You will hear what is in the *lontar* and what constitutes hearsay. You will hear the *satua*. The word *satua* means a composition or story. But the word *tattwa* means the person existed, the object existed and the actions occurred. So later you can think, the hearsay tells it like this, and then you can draw conclusions about how the hearsay and the *lontar* correspond (Sedana 250107).

The *lontar* are what is called *pingit akena juga*. Balinese people generally think that if something is *pingit akena juga* then they shouldn’t even dare to read it, but that is wrong. If it is *pingit akena juga*, *ayua wera arang wong weruha* it means take good care of this, study it, but do not misuse it and do not use it in places where it is not needed. That’s what those words really mean. But because people don’t really understand what *pingit akena juga* means, they just put their *lontar* on a shrine and make offerings to them, but they never read them. So even some people with *lontar* don’t know what is in them.

But I take down one every day, so in thirty days, thirty. I read it right to the end of a section (*baithani*), and then when I’ve finished I put it back. Whichever one I need, whichever one is required, I take down. I use a code, and take it down, so I don’t have to go right back to the beginning. That’s how the Balinese ancestral texts were used in the past (Sedana 250107).

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9 Wiener (1995:78) also noted people’s frequent reference to *kocap* or *reke* – ‘I have heard’ – implying the speakers’ inability to verify the truth of their statements.

10 My husband or my sister-in-law. Nyoman and Komang are both names given to the third born child and while most people call my husband Nyoman, Pak De generally refers to him as Komang.

11 Pak De explained that the *lontar* volumes referred to as *Bad* cover 1,000 years of historical time and are divided up into 100 year segments called *baithani*.
Chapter 1: The thesis

This composite thesis is an exploration of the efficacy of a distinctive type of Balinese stories.

As a composition, this thesis comprises two discrete but intersecting pieces of writing: a fictional Screenplay, and this Dissertation, in which I experiment with, and move between, different narrative forms. I use the term Dissertation to distinguish this more theoretical part of my thesis from the Screenplay. Thus, when I refer in the Chapters that follow to my Dissertation, I am talking about this document in particular. When I refer to the thesis, I mean to indicate the larger conjoined project, which incorporates both this Dissertation and the Screenplay.

Balinese lives are replete with stories. These stories evoke the world as a place where the lives of human beings are tied to unseen elements of the world: to the ongoing presence and potency of Ancestors, Gods, Spirits, and invisible beings, and the realms where they reside. These stories are transmitted by word of mouth, through prayer and mantra, through ceremony and ritual, through drama, dance, song, poetry, puppetry, art and television.

A great many of the stories that pervade the Balinese cultural landscape have their basis in ancient lontar and are described, by Balinese who are knowledgeable about such things, as tattwa. As I will explore, tattwa narratives are stories which are capable of producing real effects - literal, material, physical, emotional - on bodies and in the world.

My challenge is to depict the cultural life world in which these stories are transmitted in ways that can bring it alive for you; that do justice to the people who tell these stories and to the world they maintain. If these stories are to be taken seriously in the terms that they themselves present, how can my writing best effect this experience? How might I transmit the essence of these Balinese narratives in ways that are capable of enacting at least something of their productive and enlivening capacity; that move beyond an analysis of their historical

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12 There are many different types of named unseen beings in the Balinese landscape, which are often referred to collectively as Makhluk Halus or Buta Kala.

accuracy or literal meaning; and that move towards a broader appreciation of localised, alternative Balinese knowledges and histories? How can I write ethnography - tell stories - in a way that focuses on learning from rather than just learning about these stories?

The process of researching these stories has not only been an intellectual exercise for me. The level of creative thinking these stories generated demanded creative forms of writing in response. Through the strategic use of different stories and different forms and styles of writing, and by allowing Pak De himself to speak through my work, I aim to bring you as close as possible to an encounter with tattwa narratives. I want to draw you in, interrupt your expectations, make you wonder, help you hear.

My creative writing produced different insights and understandings than my academic writing, and the two fed into each other in productive ways. The creation of a fictional world in the Screenplay provided a space for raising questions about cultural identity and the ways we interpret the world. It enabled a more nuanced expression of the enlivening capacity of tattwa narratives. In turn, the insights afforded through the creative writing process enriched the intellectual challenge of thesis writing and emboldened me to write and structure this Dissertation in more imaginative ways.

I cannot purport to be an objective ethnographer. Being part of a particular Balinese family has shaped and determined the research this thesis is based on. My engagement with Bali and the relationships that inform this work go well beyond the fieldwork experiences which have been ‘written up. Balinese cultural discourse has it that non-Balinese women who marry Balinese men ‘become’ Balinese.\textsuperscript{14} However, ‘becoming Balinese’, in my experience, is an ongoing process, and one destined to remain incomplete. I can only ever be a partial insider, and not just because I primarily reside in Australia. Visits ‘home’ to Bali, however long they last, are always intensive stretches of immersion and enculturation for me.

This project was born of my desire to explore the stories I have been told again and again by family and community members in Bali as part of this process of enculturation; stories told in order to ‘emplace’ me within the cultural world I married into; stories that animate the

\textsuperscript{14} This is formally enacted during wedding ceremonies when foreign brides undergo (somewhat belatedly and in abbreviated forms) the various Balinese infant and childhood rituals that (among other things) connect people to the land and to their ancestors. For further discussion of Balinese lifestyle ceremonies see for example Bateson and Mead 1942; Eiseman 1990.
landscape and compel me to experience it in new ways. Hearing these stories, then, becomes a matter of taking them in and of being taken into the world they portray. The ways I have come to write and write about these stories derives from the ways in which Pak De, by example, has taught me to hear and tell and talk about them. In particular I am concerned, in both the Dissertation and the Screenplay, with not only demonstrating how stories are used to transmit cultural knowledge within Balinese families and communities but with giving these stories life outside these families and communities, outside Bali, and outside the page (Muecke forthcoming 2011:19).

In this Dissertation, I explicitly acknowledge Pak De’s authority. I take up his insistence that telling these stories implicates both speaker and audience, and carries responsibilities and obligations. Pak De holds responsibility for lontar texts in which these tattwa narratives are inscribed, and has obligations concerning who they are told to and how they are told and interpreted. In telling me, he implicates me in these stories in specific ways. While I cannot, nor would it be appropriate to implicate readers who are neither Balinese nor family in the same way, in re-telling these stories here, I nevertheless aim to enact for you forms of storytelling which privilege these types of kinship based, family oriented and localised relationships, responsibilities and obligations.

Pak De taught me that the reproduction of the Balinese narratives that are the subject of this thesis is primarily a matter of relationships. That is, they are reproduced within the context of familial relationships and themselves are productive of establishing particular types of relationships within and between family and community members. There are a great many tattwa narratives in broad circulation which deal with shared Balinese concerns such as the creation of the island of Bali, and the pantheon of Hindu gods. However, there are others that are more narrowly focused, as this thesis explores, and relate to particular locally important ancestors, temples, and landscapes. These narratives are reproduced in the context of family and community life in ways which create and reinforce significant familial connections and obligations and ensure the continuity of these connections and obligations across time.

Pak De stresses that the textual origins of these narratives is significant to their identification as a particular type of story – that is, tattwa rather than satua stories (as I discuss in Chapter 2). However, a more formal academic study of Balinese lontar texts falls outside of my project because it precludes the types of intimate human relationships of storytelling that are
my focus here\textsuperscript{15}. The subject of my thesis is particular locally significant narratives as they are told between subjects who are socially and culturally enmeshed in specific ways through story telling itself. Both this Dissertation and my Screenplay reflect the central theme of this thesis: localised cultural forms of knowledge are transmitted through stories which are reproduced and efficacious in the context of \textit{implicated relationships}.

In developing a model of implicated story telling throughout this thesis, I am equally mounting a critique of classical anthropological expectations. Anthropologists in the field are expected to adopt a methodology known as ‘participant observation’. However, this stance has been problematised by a number of contemporary ethnographers. Tedlock (1992:xiii) expresses a preference for ‘observant participation’ in which ‘ethnographers use their everyday social skills in simultaneously experiencing and observing their own and others’ interactions within various settings’. Lassiter (2000:607) drawing on Tedlock (1992), emphasises the discrepancy between the ‘participation’ implied in the close intimate relationships that occur between family and friends, and the ‘observation’ required during fieldwork which privileges a neutral outside position of distance and remove. He identifies Tedlock’s stance as a move from observing the Other to observing the \textit{human relationship between} Self and Other, that is, her approach is one which acknowledges that ethnography is ultimately determined by \textit{relationships} between people (2000:608).

My own position renders the objective stance implied by ‘participant observation’ problematic, and uniquely situates me as an ‘observant participant’ — one who is family and foreigner, student and anthropologist, story teller and ethnographer. I have been fortunate enough to observe and experience the transmission of cultural knowledge through stories within a Balinese family where such knowledge is highly prized. I have both undertaken formal ethnographic research and lived as part of a family. This privileged position ensures that I am not only bound to ‘hear’ these stories in implicated ways, but to re-tell them in ways that honour the relationships concerned. Who ‘I’ am in this Thesis is not incidental.

\textsuperscript{15} A number of linguistic and historical analysis of \textit{lontar} exist in the literature (see for example Rubinstein 2000; Zurbuchen 1987; Vickers 1990; Worsley 1990). These more formal analysis are not however the subject of this thesis, focused as my research is on the efficacious presentation of narratives transmitted orally and contextually.
The Dissertation

In constructing this academic Dissertation, I have selected certain stories, discussions, events and experiences in order to produce particular effects. I combine narration, translation, and exposition; shift from first to second to third person narrative; change position from the one who speaks to the one who is listening; and change perspective from that of observer to that of participant. The narratives here are dialogic: full of characters (in both senses of the word) that speak and speak to each other.

I developed this multi-vocal approach and blend of narrative forms in order to impart the feel and texture of my discussions with Pak De. When he was teaching me, he continuously changed voices and narrative styles as he shifted from past to present; from tattwa narratives to stories of his childhood; from text to memory; from teacher, to uncle; from speaking as himself to reciting instructions and dialogue in the voices of his father, his grandfather, and of Ancestors, Gods, Spirits and other unseen beings that inhabit the (Balinese) world. As I will demonstrate, this layering of narrative styles is significant to both the transmission of tattwa narratives and to their effects.

Reflexive stories about the anthropologist’s own experiences and encounters in the field are a conventional way of taking the reader into a cultural world within a given ethnography. Here, they provide a means of attesting to the potentiality of Balinese knowledges encapsulated in tattwa narratives. While alert to the dangers of being overly reflexive, I am very much present in this Dissertation. Being part of a Balinese family has been significant to my work. It would not be honest of me to obscure or underplay the significance of kinship by assuming the voice of ‘objective’ ethno grapher, nor would it be appropriate to present those members of my family who have contributed to this thesis as anonymous or impartial ‘Balinese informants’. However, there is another reason for the incorporation of what might appear to be personal anecdotes. As will become apparent, personal stories are integral to the transmission of local Balinese knowledges and the narratives in which they are embedded. I use these methods of story telling here in order to reproduce their effects.

16 In referring to Balinese knowledges and practices in this thesis I mean knowledges and practices that are inscribed in Balinese lontar and believed by those who hold them to be indigenous to Bali. This is not necessarily a view shared by all Balinese, Indonesian and foreign scholars.
I also utilise experimental story telling in order to critically engage in writing a new kind of ethnography. Considerable changes have occurred to the conventions of ethnographic writing since the 1970s when a ‘scientific’ and ostensibly objective style of ethnographic writing was favoured. In 1977, Paul Rabinow wrote one of the first ethnographies to break with ethnographic conventions by reflecting on the experience of fieldwork itself. This was not well received at the time, as his work was considered too personal and not scientific enough (Rabinow 2007), yet it has become a classic text with lasting repercussions in the discipline today. In the early 1980s, in what came to be known of as the ‘Writing Culture’ debates, a ‘crisis of representation’ was identified in anthropology (for further discussion see for example Marcus and Cushman 1982; Clifford and Marcus 1986). Ethnography, rather then being an objective scientific methodology, was, for the first time, identified as a form of writing, with its own formal set of literary conventions, deployed generically to create particular discursive effects. Some of the literary conventions common to anthropology included writing in the third person; using the objective voice of reportage; using only the singular or mono voice of the ethnographer; and deploying broad generalising terms, such as ‘the Nuer’, or ‘Aboriginal people’.

One of the more contested conventions was the right of the anthropologist to write and represent others without acknowledgement of their own presence and interests. Using the generic authorial voice of the anthropologist to write about others in this way was criticised for being another way of speaking for colonised communities and subjects, and thus contributing to their silenced and/or mis-represented and marginalised status. The questioning of the anthropologist’s right to write dovetailed with the growing emergence of identity politics and postcolonial debates in the 1980s – 1990s which saw indigenous, diasporic, and other colonised peoples asserting their rights to self-representation, often for the first time.

While fieldwork has always been the defining methodology of anthropology, the fieldwork experience itself, and the position of the anthropologist as thus implicated in the ‘knowledge’ produced, had previously been excluded in ethnographies which were presented as factual accounts of people, places and events. In the rare case that anthropologists reflected on their own experiences in the field, they tended to do so within private autobiographical memoirs, not within their ethnographic accounts (Tedlock 2005:153).
With the acknowledgement that both fieldwork experiences and literary devices play a crucial role in the structuring of ethnographic texts, anthropologists are no longer expected to take on the ‘objective voice’ of the omniscient social scientist. As a genre of literature, ethnographic writing has invited experimentation. This has resulted in a range of experimental ethnographies which set out to challenge previous ethnographic conventions in various ways. These new ethnographies are more often narrative in structure, and concerned with asking the reader to identify with worlds and peoples they are unfamiliar with rather than simply presenting information ‘about’ others. Some newer ethnographies blend ethnographic monographs with autobiographical memoir in order to reflect on the anthropologist’s participation in the field in a form Tedlock (2005:153) terms ‘autoethnography’.

However, as Behar (1996:8) has discussed, this does not mean reducing ethnography to autobiography alone. Behar identifies her own work as an attempt to find a way of writing ethnography that fills a void between the actual (personal subjective) experience of fieldwork and the production of informative ethnography (objective knowledge) (1996:9). DeVault (1998:668-9) points out that contemporary ethnography is increasingly personal, as more and more ethnographers abandon distant, impassionate, objective modes of writing in favour of emotional and passionate ones. There are now many ethnographers pushing for greater acceptance of the emotive and bodily presence of ethnographers in their work as well as producing more sensual and affective styles of writing themselves (for examples see Stewart 2006, 1997; Behar 1996; Muecke forthcoming 2011; Stoller 1997, Tedlock 1992, 2005).

This move to contemporise ethnographic writing has not been uniform. Nor is there agreement amongst anthropologists concerning which styles of writing are acceptable to the discipline and which are not. However, it has now become imperative that ethnographers declare their presence in the field and within the text, as well as to incorporate the voices of people they encounter in the field. Fieldwork is a personal as well as an intellectual journey, and in order to convey the significance of our intellectual findings, it has become necessary to impart something of the personal. The personal is not incidental in ethnographic writing. The anthropologist is a cultural being and thus their experiences in the field are important to an understanding of the cultural world being presented.

Increasingly anthropologists are producing work which incorporates a variety of styles of writing and narrative in their work. Dialogic or multi-voiced ethnographies are more
representative of the ways in which the ethnographer gains their own cultural knowledge in the field and give greater authority to those that inform their work (Lassiter 2006:209; Stoller 1997:37). Allowing others to speak more directly, and mediated less by the anthropologist’s representational voice and analytical framework, literally gives greater voice to the differences being described, and a greater feel for those differences. Using different writing styles produces different effects.

Abu-Lughod (1993:1-2), frustrated with the limitations of the standard anthropological monograph, structured an ethnography around stories and storytelling in order to capture ‘life as lived’. Stoller (1997), as well as including stories in his work, also combines different styles of writing including poetry, autobiography, dialogue, photographs, descriptive prose and academic styles, in pursuit of a more ‘sensuous’ approach to ethnography. Gibbs (2003:309) argues that the use of creative storytelling has emerged as a critical intervention, in order to oppose the ‘dispassionate, distancing, putatively objective forms of critical and theoretical writings which tended to define traditional academic writing’. She argues for new models of writing that purposefully utilise ‘fictional and poetic strategies to stage theoretical questions’. She describes this as an essential characteristic of fictocriticism, a term that came to be used for ‘hybrid forms of writing which mixed genres, eschewed omniscient modes of narration and ‘grand narratives’ in favour of first-person or multiple partial perspectives and an emphasis on local and singular stories and fragmented forms’ (Gibbs 2003:309).

In writing this thesis, I attempt to take up these challenges. This thesis is situated within this new trajectory of experimental ethnographic writing in its concern to move away from the task of representing other people and cultures as an anonymous group of ‘others’ who share a collective take on the world17. It is located within the genre of experimental ethnographic writing in the way that it blends voices, narrative styles, and approaches in order to get across something more than facts and analysis, in order to produce something more accessible and inclusive and which aims to take the reader closer to the experience of the ethnographer, and the world of their research. It is located within these experimental styles of writing in its

17 In the ethnography on Bali, this stance has been particularly advocated by Hobart (for example, see 1999, 1997, 1991, 1990, 1985). Hobart applies a caveat to his references to ‘the Balinese’ and ‘Balinese culture’ through statements such as: ‘I do not wish to suggest there is any essential Balinese culture. There are only the myriad statements and actions which people living on the island of Bali, and calling themselves Balinese, engage in’ (1985:98).
inclusion of a creative fictional form of writing aimed at producing sensual and emotive responses in the reader. I adopt fictocritical and storytelling strategies across this Dissertation as well as in the Screenplay itself because how things are said, and written makes a difference to what can be known (as Gibbs 2005, attests). This thesis tells stories in particular ways in an attempt to make a difference to what can be known about Balinese stories, and to show how Balinese stories can make a difference to what can be known.

In locating myself within the Dissertation, I acknowledge my responsibilities and declare my participation in both the stories and the world they represent. Incapable of ‘depersonalising’ members of my own family, I have instead chosen to ‘personalise’ them, in particular Pak De. In ceding the voice of authority to Pak De, I position myself as a kind of apprentice storyteller; one learning to tell stories in ways appropriate to and respectful of their cultural roots. This is not about learning to emulate Balinese narrative styles or genres, nor is it about analysing Balinese them. Rather, it means seeking ways of re-telling stories which enable something of their efficacy to be experienced by the reader.

Muecke (forthcoming 2011:2) defines ‘experimental writing’ as ‘writing that necessarily participates in worlds rather than a writing constituted as a report on realities seen from the other side of an illusory gap of representation’. Unable to objectify a world I subjectively participate in, I experiment in this thesis with writing that participates, and allows readers to participate, in the world of my fieldwork and the stories produced within it. This means eschewing more traditional styles of ethnographic writing in favour of experimentation.

The Screenplay

The inclusion of a Screenplay is unconventional in an anthropology thesis. However, the Screenplay is an integral part of this thesis and of my ethnography. While I intend the Screenplay to stand alone as a work of dramatic fiction, it was developed in tandem with the Dissertation, and informed by the same circumstances, experiences, and field research. The Screenplay and the Dissertation are united in their concern to demonstrate the efficacy of tattwa narratives as an embodied form of storytelling aimed at the transmission of culturally-based knowledges across generations. Both components of this thesis raise the possibility that these knowledges can be real and meaning-full beyond the places, cultures, and languages in which they are thought only to reside.
While I have experimented with other genres of fiction writing as a means of exploring cross-cultural experience, I chose the Screenplay form here for several reasons. The pared back style of writing, the need to whittle down dialogue, description and direction so there is as much to read between the lines as within them, and the demand for visually-driven prose, made it a fitting medium for exploring ideas emerging from my fieldwork experiences. In the field - as well as in screenplays - visual clues can be even more important than dialogue in helping us to understand what is going on. Constructing the Screenplay involved putting together individual elements in particular ways to create specific effects and affects, using words, images and symbols in ways that are not just concerned with transmitting ‘meaning’, but in creating mood and atmosphere capable of emotionally charging everyday moments. As a work of fiction, the Screenplay enabled me to creatively transform complex and culturally specific understandings of the world in order to bring them to life in the way that tattwa narratives themselves do.

As a specific medium of storytelling, film calls on us to identify with others who are not like ourselves and to open up to life worlds beyond our own. Film, and the screenplays from which they derive, produce this encounter with others in specific ways. As audience, we expect to be caught up in another world, to travel to places we have never been, to suspend disbelief and accept the rules of the world which the screen(play) presents to us. By locating my Screenplay about Balinese enculturation in the relatively familiar setting of suburban Sydney, the modern ‘western’ English-speaking city where I live, I aim to bring something of the world of the field closer to a non-Balinese audience. In locating the story in this world but importing the ‘rules’ of a less familiar world, I aim to unsettle the audience’s expectations.

In order for you, the audience, to enter into the world of the story in the Screenplay (familiar, and unfamiliar at the same time), you need to be able to identify in some way with the protagonist. By using a child as my main character, I invite the broad identification that children offer. Discovering a new world, as we do as anthropologists in the field, and as we do when we immerse ourselves in film and literature, is not unlike being a child and having to learn the rules all over again. By inviting you to identify with Chloe, the child in the Screenplay, I want you, like Chloe and the other characters in the story, to form your own interpretations of her experiences and reactions. However, in contrast to the Dissertation, I want this experience to be primarily emotional and intuitive. Laura Marks (2000:145) argues...
that, ‘Film is grasped not solely by an intellectual act but by the complex perception of the body as a whole’. While a screenplay is a piece of writing, I aspire to play with the embodied nature of film and its haptic possibilities by working up evocative imagery that calls to mind the audience’s own sensory memories: fingers running over the bark of trees; tracing the veins of leaves; pushing into soil; rubbing herbs; swish of wind through trees; buzz of chainsaw; slow drip of sap. I want the audience to be sensuously entranced by the rhythms of the familiar in order to make them more open to the unfamiliar.

While alert to the variety of genres through which Balinese knowledges and narratives are publicly performed and reproduced, I stress again that this is not a ‘Balinese story’. I chose the Screenplay because film is a familiar (to me) western style of public storytelling capable of presenting the ambivalent relationship between what is real and what is imagined in both verbal and non-verbal ways. In this case, I am the story teller, and the story I tell, being of my own creation, rather than strictly based on traditional Balinese texts, is most definitely satua. However, it was inspired by and incorporates elements of what I have learnt both from particular tattwa narratives and about the efficacy of certain cultural narratives in acting on and transforming individuals. Thus I wrote this story in order to experiment with forms of both satua (the story I wrote about Chloe) and tattwa (the culturally based stories Chloe’s grandmother tells Chloe).

Like the Dissertation, the Screenplay was not only inspired by my fieldwork in Bali. It equally draws on my experiences of witnessing the dislocation that can occur in migrant Balinese and Balinese/Australian communities. In many cases, adapting to life in Australia results in Balinese cultural life worlds becoming distant, marginal, or even absent for emergent generations. It also reflects on the attempts made in my own family to prevent this from occurring.

My Screenplay is a story, a written narrative, not (yet) a work of film. However, given that film begins its life on the page, this Screenplay might best be identified with a genre which Marks (2000) calls ‘intercultural cinema’. Marks employs this term for a genre of new and emerging films produced by or between two cultures, or by those who live as minorities on the margins of dominant European societies, who aim to represent “configurations of sense perception different from those of modern Euro-American societies” (2002:xiii). She argues that intercultural cinema operates through specifically sensate and emotional modes of
representation in order to evoke unknown, unrepresented or disavowed aspects of identity and history. While my work is not as a film maker, my Screenplay may be understood within this broad framework, in so far as it operates to bring to life experiences of migration, assimilation and displacement. Its central concern is the interruption and continuity of cultural identity for a child who is a third generation Balinese/Australian migrant.

As a child in a family which is, at least on one level, unquestionably ‘Australian’, my protagonist has little knowledge of the Balinese culture of her grandmother, herself a voluntary adult migrant long since adapted to life in Australia and estranged from the life world of her own childhood. However, unlike Chloe’s mother, who seems un-conflicted about the Australian identity she has carved out for herself, Chloe is confronted by circumstances which prompt her to question and explore her cultural identity.

In the Screenplay, Chloe’s grandmother tells her stories in order to transmit cultural knowledge. These stories are *tattwa* narratives. The transmission of culturally-based knowledge via *tattwa* narratives is not necessarily, and in fact not usually, enacted through formal contexts of teaching and learning - between student and teacher, or researcher and consultant\(^\text{18}\). It is far more common, in my experience, for *tattwa* narratives to emerge organically, as stories told within families and communities by those who know those stories when circumstance or inclination calls for them. Which stories are known, when, and why they are told, and to whom, is largely dependent on a combination of relationships (past and present) and circumstances. It is this aspect of *tattwa* narratives that I aim to impart through the Screenplay, in order to demonstrate, again, how these stories both draw people together and draw people into particular experiences of the world.

Chloe is a troubled child, seeking information and guidance. In way of response her grandmother draws on those ‘stories’ and ‘knowledges’ from her own culture that she knows and deems appropriate. She is not an authority, a teacher, or an expert in classical Balinese texts. However, she has grown up with stories that explained the world to her, and understands that there is a need both to pass those stories on to Chloe and to help her interpret her experiences. *Tattwa* narratives exist within, and reproduce a particular world, and something of that world needs to be reproduced through their telling in order to render them

\(^\text{18}\) In these contexts non-narrative forms of teaching are also more likely to take precedence.
sufficiently meaning-full. Whether or not Nini’s stories are the same as those told by other Balinese grandmothers in her village back in Bali, or by people from other parts of the island, is beside the point. Whether or not she can read the *lontar* texts they derive from or is even aware of the original *lontar* from which they derive is irrelevant to the efficacy of these stories *in the present*. She is passing on an understanding of the world as it was passed on to her, and through the stories in which she does this, a particular relationship of intimacy is established between her and Chloe, and between Chloe and the world of these stories. My Screenplay is ‘intercultural’ in that it establishes the possibility of intimacy between purportedly disparate cultural worlds. It is intercultural in that it demonstrates how the stories and cultural knowledges of one culture can have real, ongoing consequences beyond the geographic boundaries of the cultural world they derive from, that is, even when the stories, and the subjects they implicate, are themselves displaced.

Although the stories that inform the Screenplay and the Dissertation are not ‘my’ stories by birth, they have become mine, inhabiting me and leaving their traces, literally in the forms of my children, and sensually, in that they have changed the way I experience and respond to the world. It is this position that Chloe represents. I have endeavoured to write both the Screenplay and the Dissertation in such a way that the enlivening, implicating nature of these narratives can be apprehended and experienced by people who don’t know the world they come from.

Ultimately, *tattwa* both call for and inspire creative and imaginative approaches to their telling and re-telling by those who are both implicated and obliged by this imperative, like I myself have become.

**The Fieldwork**

The official fieldwork for this thesis was carried out over a period of approximately twelve months across a period of 3 years between 2006 and 2009.

However, when I began this fieldwork research with Pak De, I had already acquired considerable Indonesian language and cultural skills through a combination of academic and professional development, and time spent living in Bali with family. In 1996, I completed an Honours degree in anthropology, after majoring in Indonesian language and culture, as well
as in anthropology as an undergraduate. In 1995, I attained my first accreditation with the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) and began working as an Indonesian translator and interpreter. In 1997, under the auspices of the National Asian Language Scholarship Scheme, I spent a year in Bali auditing classes at Udayana University on translation, interpretation and regional narratives. Since that time I have worked consistently as a professional Indonesian translator (of the written word) and interpreter (of the spoken word) in a broad range of fields including literature, medicine, law, media, (including subtitling for television news and current affairs programs), education, government and tourism, working both privately and through translation and interpreting agencies. I have worked on the development of Indonesian language teaching materials, and taught Indonesian privately, through language schools and at the University of Technology, Sydney.

I first met my husband, Nyoman, in Indonesia in 1991, when we were both still studying, he in Lombok, Indonesia, and I in Sydney, Australia. Since then, I have spent a portion of every year living in Bali, first as a student, and then along with Nyoman and later our children, as part of a Balinese family. For the first several years of our relationship, Nyoman and I communicated primarily in Indonesian, and although in Australia we more often speak English now, we return to speaking Indonesian (increasingly mixed with Balinese) whenever we are in Bali, and continue to code-switch in Australia in an effort to raise our children bilingually.

Hobart (1996) writes of the journey of the ethnographer from the time they enter the field and the mutual disciplining that occurs between researchers and informants. My situation is somewhat different from those he describes. By the time I began doing ‘fieldwork’, I had been well trained in how to behave by my extended family, and made my fair share of mistakes and misinterpretations along the way. Unlike the people with whom Hobart (1996:14) describes working with when he first began fieldwork in Bali, Pak De assumed a subject position with which he was completely familiar and adept, and assigned me a position with which I was equally accustomed. When I first approached Pak De about helping me with my research, he set out how often and on what days and times I might expect him to be
available and explained to me something of his teaching methodology. In essence, this consisted of him letting me know that I would have to learn to walk before I could run.\(^{19}\)

The ‘field’ of my formal fieldwork was a small busy courtyard in the back lanes of a village on the outskirts of Denpasar, Bali’s capital city, where Pak De and his family live.\(^{20}\) However, my discussions with Pak De traversed a much wider realm than this might suggest. I left each of our sessions feeling that the world was opening up before me, inside me, that the world, and human beings themselves, were full of previously unimagined, unexpected possibilities. I found myself renewed, invigorated with a new sense of optimism about humanity and the earth. I experienced this sense of exhilaration internally, as a fullness, an openness, a buzz. On my return to Australia after a six month research stint, many people commented on what they perceived as a change in me, using words like happy, relaxed, lightness, glowing. ‘What did you bring back with you?’, one friend inquired, causing me to reflect further on just what it was that I had experienced, that I was feeling, that could be seen by others.

My fieldwork notes reflect my excitement. At one point I wrote that I understood how people must feel when they ‘find’ religion. It was not religious ecstasy that I was feeling, although I did develop a greater understanding of the knowledge systems underlying many Balinese practices.\(^{21}\) While that was in part an academic revelation it was also a sensory one, leading me to embody the experiences of making offerings, of prayer, and of ceremonial participation in new ways. But what I learnt in Bali, what I ‘brought back’ from Bali, was something more elusive yet. Was it possible to bring that something out through my writing?

Fieldwork was necessarily, and appropriately, a family affair. During my longest period of fieldwork Nyoman took leave from the Australian school where he teaches and we put our children into local schools in Bali. Other fieldwork visits took place during Australian school

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\(^{19}\) Hobart’s (1996:9) 4th law of ethnography reads: ‘People gear down information to the ignorance of the anthropologist’. Good teachers are particularly skilled at this kind of gearing down, and I am well aware that Pak De tailors his discussions to my level of comprehension just as he does for all his students.

\(^{20}\) Although ‘home’ is Banjar Batu Ngang in Beraban, Tabanan.

\(^{21}\) While the knowledge systems I refer to are taught, practiced, performed and utilised throughout Bali, for the majority of Balinese they are part of lived experience rather than the subject of study or analysis.
holidays. While Nyoman looked after the children, and attended to his responsibilities in our banjar in Tabanan, I spent several days a week at Pak De’s carrying out research.

In my experience of Bali, people rarely use the phone to make plans or find out if someone is home before visiting, even though just about everybody seems to have mobile phones now. The custom is to drop by unannounced, and then, if the person you are looking for is not there, you either leave and come back some other time, or wait for as long as it takes. This means that I often turned up at Pak De’s to find he had been called away to conduct a ceremony, or taken his wife, Mek Man, to the markets, or returned to his banjar for family reasons. I either waited or didn’t depending on what else was going on and how long I thought the wait might be. On other occasions I might turn up at eight in the morning and find he already had twenty patients waiting to see him. I either spent the morning with other members of the family or left and tried again another day.

As a member of the family, I was always welcome at Pak De’s home, and have earned the privilege of making my own coffee and eating meals there. When I visited Pak De as a patient, or we took a sick child to see him, we waited our turn, although, like other patients with sick children we might be moved forward in the queue depending on how sick the child and how long the queue. While waiting, the kids would make themselves comfortable in the house playing computer games or watching television or listening to pop music with Pak De and Mek Man’s sons, Putu and Edy, who although officially their uncles, are the same age as many of their cousins and treated without deference. While Pak De is too busy to visit us at home except during ceremonial occasions when he acts as our mangku, his children visit often, and also treat our home as their own.

While Pak De ministers to patients, advises clients, teaches students, studies lontar, and oversees and conducts ceremonies, Mek Man attends to the children and household, shopping, cooking, as well as to the vital work of creating and setting out the daily offerings (and balian require a great deal more of these than the average household). On ceremonial

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22 Banjar, usually translated as ward or hamlet, refers to a small community consisting of family compounds whose members, to a large degree, are related by ties of birth and marriage and are tied together by shared responsibility for banjar facilities such as temples, community centres (Bale Banjar), and irrigation networks. They also share responsibility for ceremonial activities held by banjar members such as childhood ceremonies, weddings, and funerals to name just a few.

23 Memek and its abbreviation Mek are Balinese terms used to address and refer to one’s mother and aunts, as well as used more generically as a respectful term of address for women.
occasions, particularly *Hari Saraswati* - when people pay homage to Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, music and creative arts - she spends weeks making the requisite offerings, and days cooking for the multitudes of visitors who bring themselves and their offerings to be blessed by Pak De. She also prepares offerings to order for family members, patients and clients.

![Canang offerings left by patients](image)

While Pak De and I chatted, there were always other people around. Mek Man would often sit nearby making offerings. If one or both of the boys were home during my research visits they often sat with us a while, listening, contributing at times. Kadek, a nephew currently living with the family and helping with the housework would move around us, sweeping and hanging out the washing on a rack in the middle of the courtyard. A neighbour might drop by to deliver greens from her garden and stay to chat with Mek Man and add a few offerings to the growing pile beside her. Patients arrived to see Pak De, and, while waiting, the women among them would come and help Mek Man with the offerings. As each patient arrived they
marked their place in the queue by putting the *canang* offerings they had bought with them, which included their payments to Pak De, on a table outside the *ruang sakti* - the special room where Pak De sees his patients. They would sit and wait on plastic chairs around the courtyard or on the balcony. If they didn’t already know who I was, they might ask politely and someone, a family member, a regular patient (and some came several times a week), a student, would identify me. Those that knew Pak De well enough might come and sit close enough to listen to our discussions, perhaps making comments or asking questions of their own.

![Pak De and I chat while Mek Man and her sister make offerings](image)

At first I felt guilty that people were kept waiting because of me. But after a while I realised that Pak De saw patients in his own time, just as he does everything, without rushing, without fussing. If I suggested I was willing to wait while Pak De attended a patient, he might tell me, no, that one needs to learn patience. He can wait a little longer. Sometimes I would look up to find that I had been so engrossed in our conversation I hadn’t notice the courtyard fill up with
people. Whole families often arrive together so crowds can build up quickly. When Pak De decided it was time to attend to his patients, Mek Man would open up the ruang sakti, take the first canang into the room, and light some incense. And so it was my turn to wait.

The Resource Base

As a result of my formal field research with Pak De, I built up an extensive resource base consisting of: approximately two hundred hours of digital recordings of our research 'sessions'; several hundred pages of the complete transcriptions of all of these recordings (and CD backups); hundreds of pages of English translations (including complete translations of entire transcripts, as well as translated segments of other transcripts); several fieldnote books; photographs and video recordings taken by either myself or by Nyoman, including images of material objects and ceremonial occasions (both during and outside of research sessions), and images of places relating specifically to my research (for example sites where tattwa narratives and other family stories were located).

This resource base is the source of primary data used in the thesis. In order to produce a systematic means for utilising this data, I created a catalogue system for the formal identification of this primary data, specifically, for cataloguing and identifying the audio recordings. All of the recordings I made with Pak De (and in turn, the transcriptions and translations I produced from these recordings) are identified and cited by author and date. As Pak De Sedana is the ‘author/provider’ of the original recorded material, his name appears first, followed by the date on which our discussion took place and was recorded. Thus, for example, (Sedana 040107) means that the material I am referencing comes from recorded discussions with Pak De made on the 4th of January 2007 of which transcripts and translations have also been made. This catalogue and citation method provides a means for the identification of, reference to, and citation of, my primary data throughout this Dissertation.

The recordings

The recordings were made during formal research sessions with Pak De at his home in Denpasar, when Pak De and I sat down together with the digital recorder turned on for the express purpose of discussing matters relevant to my research. These sessions took place over approximately 60 days during my fieldwork oriented visits to Bali between 2006 and 2009. The majority of recordings representing one day’s discussion session(s) are between two and
three hours long. On some days we had two or three sessions interrupted by breaks, often for considerable lengths of time, as Pak De attended to other duties. Thus a three hour recording may represent a five hour visit to Pak De’s home. The recordings encapsulate only the most formal aspect of my research and these formal sessions remained very much separate and distinct from all the other social visits, consultations, and ceremonial occasions that took place between my own family and Pak De and his family. These instances also involved a great deal of discussion, and while no audio-recordings were made, they provided background for my research.

Despite the busyness of his household, and the never ending demands for his time and attention, once Pak De sat down to talk with me, and the digital recorder was switched on, he was always completely focussed. At these times he would often launch straight into a narrative, tell me a story, continue on from a previous discussion or introduce some new element for me to consider. He might start by bringing out a lontar, a notebook, a picture, or some other item to show me, in demonstration of something he had been telling me or was intending to tell me. At these times I often asked permission to take photographs to complement the audio recordings, which was usually, but not always, granted. In the later stages of my fieldwork, he more often began with the words, ‘So, Anna, what do you want to ask me now?’

The focus of my research and the questions I asked Pak De influenced the direction of our discussions and the nature of the translations and interpretations he provided. At times it is clear, when listening to the recordings, or when reading the transcripts or translations, that I have led him away from or towards a particular point. Often I seem to be reiterating things he has just said, but this was an important part of the process through which I tested my understanding and clarified misunderstandings. Sometimes, my questions and comments seem to leap out of nowhere, relating as they do to matters we discussed on some other occasion or to the workings of my own mind at the time. At other times, it is evident that Pak De is telling me particular stories for his own reasons, even when those reasons weren’t always immediately apparent to me at the time. Revelation often arrived at unexpected moments.

As well as the words of our discussions, the tape recorder captured a whole range of other household sounds. Mek Man asking, ’Ba madaar? - Have you eaten yet? - offering a plate of
boiled bananas, a drink of seaweed jelly and coconut milk, a glass of coffee. Women chatting in the background as they carried out the work of sewing leaves and grasses into ceremonial offerings. The caged birds in the courtyard singing out for attention, the rowdy geese from across the road marching into the yard and being hissed back out again. The insistent crowing of roosters. The sound of the rain dripping pouring teeming. Relatives neighbours students clients patients stopping by to offer help or seek advice, or just to chat, asking Pak De, *Tamu uli ja?* - Where does your visitor come from? - Cousin Edy home from school, practising his English, *How are you, Mbok Anna?*²⁴ The television radio computer games on in the background, phones ringing, post arriving. Nyoman turning up with lunch, with the kids, Kak De²⁵, they call this grandfather, I have a sore tummy, my ears hurt, can you fix me? Can I pick a mango, a *belimbing*, a *jambu*?

Listening to the recordings back in Australia takes me right back to that courtyard, the background noises calling out to all my senses, the damp warmth of air on the skin, the scent of incense and coconut oil and sandalwood, the bite of chilli on the tongue, the sense of wonderment relived again and again. As I transcribe the words, all else lingers about them.

It is to these recordings that I return again and again - while writing, while translating - to determine not just what was said, but *how* it was said, the tone of voice, the moments of emphasis, the laughter between the lines, the language itself. It is these recordings that remind me again and again how Pak De continuously switched between narrative modes and styles and voices: reciting from the *lontar* in unfamiliar languages, then translating those words into a dialogue between the Gods; explaining how the text of a *lontar* has been transformed into what looks like a diagram in a notebook, and how what looks like a diagram is actually text; telling me a story about selling coconuts with his sister during childhood, then one of a challenge faced while fasting on a mountain top as a young man; discussing where the soul lies then offering me advice on how to deal with a small child’s tantrums; sharing a bowl of fruit, then showing me how he can light a stick of incense using his thumb and forefinger; telling me a story of the origin of the earth, then explaining the origins of the

²⁴ *Mbok* is a term of address for older sisters, cousins, and women older than oneself but not of one’s mother’s generation, in which case they are addressed as *Memek/Mek.*

²⁵ *Pekak* is a Balinese term for grandfather, and *Kakek* an Indonesian term for grandfather. Both are generally abbreviated to *Kak*, or sometimes *Kek.*
word balian. It is this approach that I attempt to emulate here in writing and writing about the tattva narratives.

The transcriptions

The transcriptions I made from these recordings are the primary source for my translations. In their totality, they comprise a searchable database that assisted me in drawing together specific material, and enabled me to find my way back to particular recordings, discussions, narratives, phrases, words.

I transcribed most of the recordings during and between my official field trips to Bali. My brother-in-law, Ketut, assisted me initially by transcribing the first ten recordings made in 2006. However, I edited each of these transcripts while listening back over the recordings before I began translating them into English. As anyone who has done transcribing will know, it is time consuming work. An hour of recording can take anywhere from a couple of hours to a couple of days to transcribe depending on the clarity of the recording, the speed of speech, and the level of background noise. Transcribing unfamiliar words and languages can be particularly painstaking and this was frequently necessary as Pak De regularly read and quoted from texts written in ancient and little known languages.

The translations

All the translations in this thesis, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. I made extensive use of numerous hardcopy and online dictionaries: Indonesian, Balinese and English, Indonesian/English, Balinese/English, Balinese/Indonesian. I utilised online and hardcopy thesauruses, and, when working in Australia, frequently googled words, names and phrases. Despite the plethora of supporting material available, I constantly came up against the limits of material translation assistance.

When experiencing translation dilemmas, my first recourse was to ask my husband, Nyoman, and other members of the family for help, but they were not always able to provide solutions. The specific meanings of Pak De’s words did not necessarily accord with more general understandings of those words. Even when the people I asked had a better idea of what Pak

27 For example, Davidson (2004), http://education...
De meant than I did, the subtleties of embodied knowledge, and different frames of reference, can be difficult to express and explain as well as difficult to grasp. On these occasions, I sought further clarification from Pak De himself who was always happy to provide further elaboration. However, the final responsibility for all my English translations rests with me, and as such I take full responsibility for any errors, discrepancies, or misinterpretations that appear in this thesis.

Despite my competency in Indonesian, my training and experience as an Indonesian/English translator, and a reasonable level of familiarity with Balinese, I was unprepared for the multi-linguistic nature and complex translation requirements of my research undertaking with Pak De.

The majority of Balinese living in Bali speak Balinese as their first language and when speaking to other Balinese. As Indonesian is the primary language of government, education and the media, most Balinese also speak Indonesian competently, and the majority of educated Balinese are completely bilingual. However, it is common (and often necessary in the case of loan words) for Balinese to incorporate Indonesian terms when speaking to each other in Balinese, as well when speaking Indonesian to each other, which in my experience they often do, to mix in Balinese terms, particularly when referring to Balinese objects and concepts.

My sessions with Pak De were conducted primarily in Indonesian. However, in saying this greater clarification is required. The Balinese narratives that form the basis of this thesis were generally relayed to me orally in Indonesian. However, at times they were also read to me or quoted to me, in part or full, in the language(s) of their textual inscription before being translated into Indonesian and/or interpreted in Indonesian for my benefit. This means that the recordings include not only Indonesian and standard forms of Balinese but other languages as well. At first these other languages passed me by, an indistinguishable blur of unfamiliar sounds quickly overtaken by the (more) familiar Indonesian translations, interpretations, and explanations that followed, and by the enthralling and often astounding

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28 Balinese has different language levels (biasa, singgih, sor) which are used to varying degrees by different people (in part depending on their mastery of those different forms) depending on the circumstances of their use and according to who is speaking to who and what they are speaking about.
nature of what these revealed. Thus the tasks of translating and transcribing revealed things I had not taken in while Pak De was talking, as my early field notes reveal.

At the time, I wrote:

I’ve been speaking Indonesian for over 15 years, translating and interpreting it professionally for at least 12. Yet still, for me, there is something about the level of comprehension that comes through the act of translation that differs from that arrived at through conversation. Of course, during my fieldwork sessions with Pak De, the topics covered are far from ordinary. While Pak De’s Indonesian is perfect, everything he tells me in Indonesian is of necessity a translation. My Balinese is rudimentary at best, but even Nyoman and Ketut say they can’t always follow what Pak De is saying. When he is teaching, which in a sense is all the time when it comes to his ‘children’, Pak De does not speak the Balinese of everyday conversation. His is a language full of complex philosophical, cosmological, spiritual and medicinal terminology. A language used to reflect on and refer to the ancient past, to Gods and Ancestors, to history and healing, story and science, knowledge and teaching. His Balinese is strongly rooted in the ancient sacred lontar texts, which themselves are multilingual. Some of these texts are inaccessible even to Balinese scholars literate in Balinese aksara (written characters). It is not the aksara that is taught in schools or even universities. Pak De’s lontar encompass various forms and levels of Balinese - Basa Dewa, Basa Dewa Nagari, Basa Bali Kuno, Basa Hewani, Basa Kayu - the language of the Gods, of old Balinese, the languages of non-human beings, of animals and even of trees. Pak De translates all these languages fluently, casually, effortlessly, into an Indonesian that I can more or less keep up with, but it too becomes a new language, one strongly spiced with ancient and unfamiliar words, of the names of Gods and Deities, of ancient kings and kingdoms, places and temples, of multi-tiered systems of knowledge and power, of species of trees and plants, of the non-human beings within and around us. And many of these Gods, Ancestors, beings are known by so many names that at times it is hard to keep track.

29 My husband and my sister-in-law.
As I listen to Pak De speak, my mind spins into spaces it is not used to inhabiting, questions mount up and when I open my mouth to speak at times I stumble over the words. Which question should I ask? Any one of them is bound to lead down new and illuminating paths.

I am reluctant to interrupt the flow of Pak De’s explanations too often, humbled by his position, grateful for his time, eager to take in whatever I can, thankful for the tiny digital recorder between us, struck dumb by my own ignorance in the face of so much knowledge. My first queries are tentative, asked in the politest Indonesian I can muster - Do you mind if I ask...? Is it okay for me to ask about...? - It’s okay, Anna, he replies calmly. It’s good to ask questions. Never stop asking questions. I become braver, and discover that no question is ever too simple, too stupid, too obvious, too repetitive, too invasive.

But there is so much to keep track of, so much new information to absorb and consider. Listening back to the recordings of these sessions, following the written transcripts my brother-in-law and I have laboured over, gives me the opportunity to hear those stories again, to hear those names again, to familiarise myself with all those new words, to see how they look. So much of what I take in feels new. I was often so busy thinking about something Pak De had just told me that at times I missed the next point, the next idea, the gist of the next story, still busy absorbing what was told previously. Rehearing, rereading, rewriting, gives me that second chance. Surrounded by dictionaries, the chance to look up words, to search for meanings, to google names. All this takes me in deeper, and inevitably raises even more questions.

Translating is something different altogether. Pak De once told me, when I remarked on his incredible memory, that when we really take something into our soul, we will surely remember it. If we read things, or hear things, or are taught things, and then forget them soon after, we have just memorised them, we haven’t really taken them into our souls. Perhaps it is hard for me to remember all the details of what Pak De has told me because it is more difficult, for me, to take all this information into my soul in a foreign language, even one in which I usually feel so comfortable. When I translate Pak De’s words into English, themselves
often words translated from the various languages of the *lontar*, into everyday Balinese, into Indonesian, perhaps only then are they absorbed by my soul. I understand, I remember. *The act of translation becomes an act of taking in.* Through translation I uncover new layers of meaning that remained elusive to me even when I was quite sure that I understood the Indonesian words perfectly well.

During one of my early trips to Bali, when I was still busy picking up the basics of Indonesian language, Memek, my (then future) mother-in-law, used to tell me stories about things I was greatly interested in but barely capable of following. I was studying naturopathy at the time and she would talk to me about traditional medicine, of which she knew a great deal. She told me how to reduce fevers, naming the individual ingredients, explaining the processes involved. I would sit there listening in fascinated incomprehension, just picking up threads - There is some sort of leaf involved. Does she mean you tie it around the child’s head? Something is ground up with some type of root - Thinking, I hope she tells me this again.

I couldn’t really be expected to follow the steps of a medicinal concoction at that stage. Every important part of a plant can have a different name, and some plants have different names for different stages of their growth. I was still preoccupied with remembering how to address people correctly. I still had to think carefully before referring to rice about whether to use the word for cooked rice, raw rice, or rice still growing in the fields. Memek knew my limitations, but her stories would have been robbed of something if I had interrupted her with constant questions about what this word or that word means. And she did tell me some of these stories again and again. But still, I can’t say I would choose to repeat many of them with authority. What if I missed a detail? What if I named the wrong part of the plant, or failed to mention it only works to reduce fever in children when the heat comes from their bellies, and not from their bowels?

There is something about listening when one cannot understand all of what one is hearing that is extremely illuminating. Instead of listening just to words, to meanings, I found myself, on these and other occasions, listening to something beyond the words themselves. And often, in those early months and years of language learning, this type of listening afforded greater understanding than achieved by listening with a focus on comprehending as much as possible (which gave me concentration headaches if kept up for long). A relaxation is
required, a letting go, to allow a listening that takes in the sounds of words, the flow of language, the melodies of speech, that allows the face to speak and the gestures of the body. The beginner adult language learner, in my experience, tends to get caught up with the processes of hearing and pronouncing words. The English speaking mind still hears foreign sounds and translates them into English before allocating meaning, then formulates an English response which must be translated into the foreign tongue. This is an awkward, ungainly, and exhausting effort, which fortunately, over time, and with practice, becomes unnecessary. At some point which is hard to pin down the new words and sounds take root within us and thereafter can be identified and called forth at will, without effort. Eventually nasi means nasi, and not cooked rice, and it is nasi that we hear and think and speak - and, of course, eat.

Pak De understands the need for repetition, which is perhaps why he so readily agreed to our discussions being recorded and transcribed and translated. He is foremost a teacher, and his methods are precise and emphatic.

There are 20 people studying with me at the moment. I tell them, this is how you look at the trees. This tree is like this, it is called this. You can practise from this book, get this many of its leaves. Then they check the leaves with the lontar. If the book says that the leaves are the right ones according to the code in this book, they are taught to mix the ingredients. This type is like this. Trees are like this - I am a jackfruit tree, I have seven siblings - That means they have to find seven species. That means all seven combined become medicine, for treating someone who has lost their memory. It is called Tran Raja. That means that their Raja Surya can’t function here, in their cerebrum. The ingredients for that medicine are mixed together, then I tap (totok) that person, and they go still. Tek, they are still. I stop their blood vessels. Tek, they freeze. Then I treat them immediately. If they can walk after taking that medicine, then it means that their medicine is correct, they can use it. After I have taught them five or six times, if they understand, they are free to use it (Sedana 040107).

Over time, during the course of my fieldwork, the initial illumination experienced through translating lessened considerably, and so did the desire to translate every transcript. The once alien words of the lontar and the knowledges, worlds and characters they elucidated started to
become familiar. The sounds of the various lontar languages that so often punctuated Pak De’s speech grew recognisable, and rather than confounding me, stalling comprehension, I found myself identifying individual words and phrases even before my ears tuned in to the Indonesian translations that followed. It was then that the task of translation in the field became focussed on determining just what Pak De meant by his use of certain words and phrases when it was evident that these were not covered by any definitions I could find. Eventually it was enough just to translate those segments of the transcripts that I wanted to incorporate in this thesis.

This thesis undertakes translations of translations of translations, but there is more than just the relaying of information at stake. Learning a new language involves instruction, repetition, rote learning, and is about so much more than simply being able to reproduce the words of one language in another. Translation is a similar process. The beginner translator so often produces what is known in the field as ‘translationese’, the awkward product of intertangled languages, which can result from things like word-for-word translation, overly literal translation, or translation where words in one language still contain the relics of the grammatical structures of another.

If the narratives I relay in and through this thesis ‘work’ in English, if they are free of ‘translationese’, if they capture something of the essence of the ‘stories’ and something of the voices in which they were told, I can take only part of the credit. My own translations owe a great debt to Pak De’s proficiency as a translator, which in turn is a reflection of his mastery of the lontar and the multi-linguistic abilities such mastery requires. Having grown up in a world where the languages of the lontar, including those representing the realms of the unseen, were the subject of intensive study, Pak De is able to understand and interpret them for others with ease and grace and his multi-lingual renditions are always both fluid and authoritative. He was, quite literally, born to do this job and has been honing these skills for most of his life, the skills required to bring the knowledge of the past into the present and ensure its continuity into the future. He once remarked to me that his only special talent was his ability to read any lontar presented to him. This ability is intrinsic, not only to the pursuit
and maintenance of the knowledges (*aji*, *ilmu*)

30 encompassed in the *lontar*, but to the task of

transmitting that knowledge to others as fitting.

In his renowned work on ‘The task of the translator’, Walter Benjamin writes:

> Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the centre of the
> language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without
> entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own
> language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one (Benjamin 1969:76).

In my understanding, Benjamin’s language forest is culture. That is, translation is not just

about translating words from one language to another, but about bringing one living world to

life in another world. Ultimately, when translating, one seeks the reverberations Benjamin

refers to. But Balinese trees, just like Balinese words, don’t always behave the way we might

expect them too, nor can they always be made to. The ‘forest’ speaks back in unexpected

ways. When I am unable to call forth any reverberation at all, it becomes necessary to move

beyond direct translation and take a walk in the forest itself. This Dissertation is, essentially,

an invitation to join me on this walk.

My translation method includes my efforts to deal adequately with the un-translatability of

certain words. The first signs I had that notions of *tattwa* were central to the stories I was

exploring was the frequency with which Pak De used the word *tattwa* and the difficulty I had

finding a suitable translation. Each word or phrase I attempted produced no echo, just a dull

absence that suggested I was missing my mark. Other words, such as *sakti*, as I explore in

Chapter 4, made equally problematic demands. Of course these words can be, and frequently

are translated, and other writers whose work concerns Balinese *lontar* and their contents have

produced careful analysis of the meaning of such significant terms31. However, I was

unwilling to appropriate other people’s definitions without question, particularly once I

discovered that my own inquiries often led to explanations that revealed further dimensions

to such terms.

30 Pak De used both the Balinese term *aji* and the Indonesian term *ilmu* when talking to me about the type of

Balinese knowledge I later gloss as knowledge/power and thus both terms appear in this thesis.

31 For example, see Lovric (1987), Connor (1986), Wikan (1990), Rubinstein (2000) and Zurbuchen (1987) on

the meaning of *sakti*. See Chapter 2 for references relating to the meaning of *tattwa*.  

42
I adopt a number of formal tactics within this Dissertation to help contend with the difficulties of translation. The most significant and frequently cited Balinese and Indonesian words, such as the Balinese terms *tattwa* and *satua*, are not translated into English, although I develop their meaning throughout this Dissertation. In these cases I want you to think *tattwa* or *satua* rather than narrative, story, or any of the other possible English translations.

With Balinese and Indonesian words used less often, and with all other non-English language terms included in this Dissertation, I use italics and provide English translations where necessary. At times I retain Balinese or Indonesian words but include an English translation in brackets. At other times I translate a word, but include the original Balinese or Indonesian word used in brackets. I use these tactics for a number of reasons: for example, while it is conventional not to translate proper names, when a proper name also means something it can be useful to indicate what that is. I use this method when doing initial translations as a means of maintaining consistency of word choice, or to note differences when consistency is not possible, or as a note to myself when I am not satisfied with a translation choice. I maintain some instances of this transparent translation of words for the benefit of readers who speak the original language and may wonder how I arrived at certain translations.

I spell Indonesian words according to the conventions for standard Indonesian language set out by the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture in 1972, and Balinese words according to the conventions established by the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture in 1974 for Latin scripted Balinese. When alternate spellings are common, such as with the word *tattwa* (also spelt *tatwa* and *tattua*), I have followed Pak De’s advice as to the most appropriate spelling. As neither Balinese or Indonesian words change form to indicate plural I have maintained that practice, so *lontar* can refer to one text or many, as should be apparent from the context.

Words and phrases that derive from textual languages other than standard Balinese or Indonesian were transcribed in keeping with the conventions used for writing Latin scripted Balinese. I take full responsibility if the spelling of these words does not conform to Latin script conventions for the languages concerned where such exist. The languages concerned have rigorous script conventions of their own but as these are beyond the boundaries of both this project and my own expertise, I have not focussed on them in any detail.
All translations of words and phrases in languages other than Indonesian were provided by Pak De. It is worth noting that while he often followed readings and recitations of non-Balinese scripted languages with Indonesian or Balinese explanations, these varied from direct translations, to more general interpretations, to interpretive comments and explanations. Where I incorporate his translations or comments I have not distinguished between these. I do not read or speak these languages myself, and, for the purposes of this Dissertation, the relevant interpretation is that of Pak De, as the person authorised to represent the lontar concerned and their contents to me.

I am not a linguist, and I do not attempt any structural or formal linguistic analysis. This thesis, as a translative endeavour, does not aim to transmit literal information (even if it strives to translate accurately). Benjamin (1969:69-70) warns explicitly against translation as a task of transmitting information. If, as he states, the essential element of a literary work is ‘the unfathomable, the mysterious, the “poetic”’, then it cannot be revealed through words alone. It is inherent to the character of the words themselves. This takes on added dimensions if we think of tattwa narratives as being made up of ‘living characters’ (see Chapter 3).

The driving imperative of this thesis is how to bring tattwa narratives to life within my own writing.

Benjamin (1969:73) argues that translation provides a ‘vital connection’ between the original text and its translation. Rather than ‘a sterile equation of two dead languages’, translation should confirm life. The translator’s task, he argues, is ‘a transformation and a renewal of something living’. The translations this thesis undertakes are, in this sense, more concerned with the ‘life’ and ‘after-life’ of the original narratives, than in either archiving or preserving their literal meaning.

Balinese textual narratives are contingent on their translatability, and this is dependent on people, like Pak De, who are trained to translate and interpret them for others. As the caretaker of numerous specific lontar, he has learnt to read and transmit their contents as appropriate. This is a distinctive cultural mode of translation and transmission, not solely a matter of linguistic expertise or literary dexterity, although it requires both. As this Dissertation will demonstrate, the transmission of lontar based narratives and knowledges is based on complex authorisations, obligations and responsibilities. How lontar should be
translated, how stories are to be told and told again, is subject to continuous discussion and
debate. The lontar texts may remain stable over time (as I will discuss in Chapter 4) but the
historical context in which these texts are accessed, continues to change as do the people
authorised to access them. How stories are told by who is a crucial aspect of their
transmission, if the ‘life’ of tattwa narratives is to be adequately maintained. Lontar texts are
authoritative, as this Dissertation will describe, but there is always a higher authority, textual
or otherwise. As Pak De so often reminded me, Di atas langit ada langit. - Above the sky,
there is the sky.

It’s like this, I am translating now for you, Anna. You are writing it down. Your
writing can be distributed. But you cannot read the lontar that I have here with
me. I have to read it first and then you can translate it (Sedana 021107).

Pak De reads and translates lontar to me while Mek Man makes offerings
When I first consulted with Pak De, I knew he was a balian and a mangku, but not that he held the title Mangku Penyarikan. I was later told by Pak De that this is the title given to the balian who has attained the highest level of aji/ilmu (knowledge/power) of all living balian. While these roles are not the focus of this Dissertation, they merit discussion. The title of Mangku Penyarikan, indicates Pak De’s high status within a particular Balinese knowledge system. It also marks him, among other things, as an authority on the Balinese palm leaf

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32 I use the term ‘knowledge/power’ to translate the Balinese term aji and its Indonesian equivalent ilmu because they are used (in this context) to refer to both particular lontar-based knowledge and the power derived from activating that knowledge.

33 Pak De is a teacher and practitioner of Aji Waringin Sungsang, a system of knowledge/power which has been passed down within his family for generations. I am aware that practitioners of other Balinese knowledge systems may have their own leaders, or not recognise any leader at all, but this is an issue which lies outside of this thesis. Those balian who consult Pak De as a teacher, as well as the thousands of patients and clients who seek his help do so in recognition of his authority.
texts called lontar and the myriad different languages, scripts, and script forms in which their contents are inscribed. In turn, he is the authority on the narratives that are the concern of this thesis, that is, the person authorised to maintain and pass on the knowledges encoded within the lontar in which these narratives are inscribed. He is the person who has authorised me to carry out the research that informs this thesis and to write it up in the ways that I have here.

The title balian is generally translated as traditional healer, or sometimes as shaman. However, it is used to refer to a broad spectrum of practitioners of traditional knowledges with a range of knowledge and skills acquired under varying circumstances. These include, but are not limited to, the acquisition of healing powers through divine means such as possession by Deities/Ancestors, through training by a senior relative (usually a grandparent), through the study of traditional medical lontar called usada, and via various combinations of the above. A number of anthropologists have published detailed studies of balian, perhaps the most well-known is Linda Connor’s (1986, 1995) detailed study of a balian taksu or spirit medium. Barbara Lovric’s (1987) unpublished thesis also examines the work of balian in considerable detail, as do texts by Uni Wikan (1990), Michelle Stephen and Luh Ketut Suryani (2000) to name only some of the most well known.

While I do not examine the role or work of balian in any detail in this thesis, the work of these scholars equipped me with an understanding of some of the practices and practitioners associated with the term balian, and the types of knowledge their work concerns. On this basis, I assumed that Pak De, being a balian who accesses lontar, including specialist medical lontar, must be a Balian Usada or ‘literate medical specialist’ (Connor 1986:33). However, when I asked him if that was the case, he responded with some amusement.

There are lots of different types of balian. Those who are called Balian Tatan Kebalianan are balian by descent, Balian Titisan or Trah, like me. I am a Balian Titisan, which means (the title) passes from balian to balian, balian to balian. Balian Tatan Kebalianan create balian through teaching and by requesting assistance from the Ancestors (Sedana 071107).

Over time I came to understand that Pak De’s work is particularly concerned with what he terms Tatan Kebalianan - the education system for consecrated balian, and Tatanan Kebalianan - the studies, challenges, and practices that classically educated consecrated
balian go through. These are systems and knowledges that have been passed down for generations through particular lontar texts in conjunction with specific teaching and learning practices. Pak De’s accounts of the education and training he underwent to become a balian and his work as a teaching balian are markedly different from written accounts of balian I have read, such as those in the literature cited above.

While the primary public roles of balian concern healing and problem solving, formally trained and consecrated balian may also be Pemangku/Mangku (priests), thus they may wear the jubah headscarves of Mangku and officiate at ceremonies. This is because on their way to attaining the title of balian students study a number of lontar texts which incorporate the studies undertaken in order to become a Pemangku. The word penyarikan is used in both Indonesian and Balinese to refer to a representative. However, the Balinese title Mangku Penyarikan refers specifically to the person who currently acts as a representative, or go-between, for those he holds responsibility for on earth, and those who reside in the realm of the Gods (Alam Dewa). The main task of the Mangku Penyarikan is to watch over all consecrated balian, whether or not they are his own students, and provide them with guidance and protection as necessary. He must ensure they don’t break the rules and ethics of the Tatan Kebalianan and Tatanan Kebalianan that govern them as students, practitioners and teachers (Sedana 120107).

There has only ever been one Mangku Penyarikan at any time, but while it is a position which depends to some extent on ancestral lineage and birthright, it is only attainable through rigorous, long term study and training.

In the ranking of balian, whoever has the highest degree is the leader, the elder, the father. Because in this era I have the highest degree, called Siwa Graha, the eighth Siwa, then the eighth Siwa is the leader. Later, if I can advance to Nawa Ruci, then Nawa Ruci will be the leader, the ninth Siwa. That is the final level of studies for balian, and the end of human studies. After that I just have to study moksartem ya jagathita, the way back home ... Only after returning to that realm

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34 These include Lontar Tri Lokanam, Ayur Weda, Batua Weda, Ajur Weda, Tattwa Weda, and Weda.
35 This does not mean it would not be possible for there to be more than one at a time, only that this has never been known to happen.
36 These degrees are part of the Tatanan Kebalianan.
can we study Aji Kanda Sanga Sami, the divine powers of the nine Gods above (Sedana 080107).

The majority of balian for whom Pak De is responsible are former students of the previous two Mangku Penyarikan, who were both widely known and highly esteemed balian in their time. The first of these was Kak Batu Ngang, Pak De’s grandfather and his main teacher, and the second was Kak Sanur, who took over as Pak De’s teacher three years before his grandfather died. After Kak Batu Ngang’s death in 1971, Kak Sanur, as the highest level balian alive, became Mangku Penyarikan. When Kak Sanur died in 1985 this title passed to Pak De. The fact that he was only 33 years old at the time caused some of the older balian to grumble and call him Mangku Penyarikan mekarbitan, implying that he had been given carbide to make him ‘ripen’ quickly. However, Pak De is quick to point out that, by that time, he had already been studying intensively for 24 years (Sedana 040107). The practitioners he is responsible for are not confined to Bali, but include balian in the Indonesian provinces of Java, Kalimantan, Lombok, Sumbawa and Flores. In addition to those balian who studied with his predecessors or with other balian, Pak De tells me that he has taken on 1860 students of his own. Only about 360 of these students wish to become balian themselves. The rest, like many students of Balinese knowledges, are training to become lower level practitioners, or seek knowledge and abilities other than those required by balian37. As with contemporary university studies, the classical education system incorporates a wide range of specialisations requiring varying levels of study and leading to different qualifications. For some people, however, the decision about which pathway to follow and how far to go along it lie beyond issues of personal preference. For some, like Pak De, a lifetime of knowledge acquisition is both their inheritance and their destiny.

Succession

When Made (Pak De) was born, his grandfather was waiting. He had already lived a very long life and was impatient for the arrival of a successor. It had to be someone who would be up to the task of monitoring the damage being done to the earth, who could learn from the experiences and achievements of the Ancestors and take the knowledge and wisdom gained

37 These include practitioners who in current terms are referred to as pendekar or paranormal, titles which require far less time and study to attain than that of balian, and studies designed to equip people for business, teaching, or leadership roles rather than healing and consultation work.
in past eras into the future. For these reasons, he asked that the soul of the original Ancestor, Kaki Tua himself, be sent back to earth. But a child embodying such a soul was in need of protection even greater than that provided to other cherished newborns. When Made arrived he was taken straight from his mother’s arms, still red from birth, without knowing the nurturing comfort of mother’s milk, and borne away to the ladang, a plantation forest in the land of his Ancestors, to be raised and guarded by his grandparents. His mother wept with the pain of separation, her breasts swollen and leaking, and his brothers and sisters wondered about the abrupt removal of the new baby. But no one doubted that Made’s grandfather, a man of unrivalled wisdom and powers, known throughout Bali as Kumpi Sakti, was doing the right thing.

Made was raised in the ladang, apart from his brothers and sisters, but still a part of their lives. As a baby he was nurtured on rice milk prepared by his grandmother, and later on the milk of young coconuts. He visited his family at their home, and they visited him in the forest, and he was adored and indulged by his grandparents. Like his brothers and sisters he attended the local village school where, as well as being taught to read and write aksara, he was drilled in the Indonesian language. But Made was already growing up in a different world to the rest of his siblings. His was a world where the past remained present and potent at all times, where the barriers between this world and other worlds remained malleable, where communication between human beings and non-human beings was taken for granted, a world where the invisible was made visible, the unseen could be seen, and the incredible persistently proved itself credible.

When Made was nine years old, his grandfather took him out of school, believing that further development to his rational mind would be to the detriment of the spiritual development that was his destiny. It was then that he began training in the knowledge traditions that had been passed down through his family for countless generations.

I was taught from when I was nine years old by Kakek in Batu Ngang, at Tanah Lot, taught the character systems. I didn’t learn how to join up the characters, I learnt the character systems. If you put this character here it sounds like this, this character here is activated by this character, this is activated with this character, and the sound of this character added to this one sounds like this. That is how I was taught by Kakek. That is why I dare say, that the highest (character systems)
are Makuta Tattwa, Kata Makuta, and Anda Kanda Tattwa which goes right up to the teachings of Dewantam (Sedana 141107). (I will discuss these character systems further in Chapter 3).

While Pak De grew up with the knowledge of his inheritance and the enormity of the task ahead of him, at times the responsibility this entailed seemed to him more like a burden than a blessing.

I said, Kakek, that’s enough, I don’t want to become a balian. I was about 14, like (my son) Kadek. I don’t want to be a balian. I don’t like it. I want to stop training to be a balian now. I just want to be a normal person. I said that to Kakek and he replied, Well if you want to stop training to be a balian can you please eat this whole pusaka\(^\text{38}\) (collection of ancestral texts and artefacts). If you don’t eat it then you will be handing it down to your descendants who will suffer because they will be burdened by objects that are too many and too heavy. I was caught between understanding and not understanding. I understood but I couldn’t answer. I knew the answer but I couldn’t respond. I felt Kakek had put brakes on my mouth. I knew the response. He meant, if this pusaka is just thrown into the sea, it will be just like during the Kingdom of Dwarawati. The earth will become sea, because this pusaka contains items with divine titles (bergelar sakti). There is a walking stick called Ki Bharada Sakti, there is a kris (wavy dagger) called Kris Naga Raja Sakti. If even one of these divinely titled items went into the sea, the sea would be angry. The sea would be angry, and everything would become sea, and I would be the cause of the earth’s destruction. That is what Kakek said.

So I was silent. Yes, silent, as though I didn’t care. But I kept studying. I studied and studied (Sedana 120107).

All those years of study have led to widespread recognition of Pak De’s expertise as both a balian and an authority on lontar, but it is his responsibility towards the appropriate acquisition, maintenance and transmission of knowledge itself that remains paramount. While he is often consulted by Balinese academics seeking his assistance with reading and interpreting lontar, there is only so much he is prepared to share with them. It is not only the

\(^\text{38}\) Pak De used both the Balinese term pusaka and the Indonesian term pustaka when talking to me.
authority of the person transmitting knowledge that is important, their relationship with the people with whom they share that knowledge is also highly significant. The knowledge Pak De will impart to his own successor is different from that he can transmit to his ‘children’, which is different again to the knowledge he will share with other balian, or with his students, or with his patients and clients. Just as each relationship within which knowledge is passed on is unique and specific, so too is the knowledge itself, the way in which that knowledge is passed on, and the implications of transmitting that knowledge for both parties.

Pak De opens a lontar
Chapter 2: Tattwa and Satua

In ancient times, when the island of Bali was free to follow the currents of the ocean it was called Bali Kulina by the Gods who descended and alighted there whenever it took their fancy. In those days the people of Bali dressed in clothes made of bark and buried their dead beneath the ground in stone coffins. They were generally happy for the sun and rain blessed them with an abundance of food to eat and for their animals to graze on, but they were made anxious by the way their world moved all about the place according to the whims of nature. They would fall asleep with the coasts of Central Java in their sights only to wake to find themselves bumping up against the shores of Lombok. Every day they had to get their bearings anew and this made them feel uncertain about all other aspects of their life and their world. The people begged Kaki Tua, their father and creator, to solve their dilemma by staking their island home firmly to the ocean floor.

Kaki Tua gave their problem some consideration, after all, he wanted his people to be happy and content. But how should he fix the land down? Kaki Tua was also the ruler of snakes and dragons, so eventually he used his powers to create one thousand dragon snakes which he gave the task of mooring the island. The dragon snakes wound themselves around the base of Bali then plunged down to the bottom of the ocean and anchored the land tightly in place.

The people of Bali were greatly relieved to find their world fixed in its position, and no longer went to sleep anxious or woke up confused. But the Gods and Deities were not happy at all. Several of them descended to earth and confronted Kaki Tua.

Why have you used these dragon snakes to tie the land down?

So they can hold the land in place and stop it being carried this way and that by the tides.

In that case why don’t you just stake the earth down? they asked.
So Kaki Tua sent the dragon snakes home and using his powers of *Aji Pancaran Bumi* he fixed the land to the ocean floor. But once Bali Kulina was attached to the earth the Gods lost their desire to come and go as they had in the past.

If you want us to come down you must first ask us to descend, they said. You will have to build special places from which you can call us down and worship us.

So it was decided. In every regency in Bali, a *Puser Tasik* shrine was built where the people could give thanks for the staking of their land. In addition, Kaki Tua began to erect temples all over Bali so that the people of Bali could call on their Gods and Deities to descend once more.

**Stories**

You may have read the above account (a version of which is also in the Screenplay), as you would read any folk tale, myth or legend, happy to suspend disbelief, sure from the very first sentence, that I, as writer of this thesis, never intended you to believe any of it. How, then, can I present such stories in ways which challenges this type of response? How can I write about *tattwa* narratives in ways which convey their efficacy as truth?

In this chapter, I discuss the problem of understanding Balinese *tattwa* narratives as simply ‘stories’. I argue that the primary significance of *tattwa* narratives lies not in what they tell us about the past or about Balinese representations of that past, but in what they do in the present.

While the concept of *tattwa* is integral to Balinese knowledge systems, (as well as to various Indian knowledge systems) there is no equivalence in western knowledge systems. However, much about the Balinese conception of *tattwa* can be revealed through an exploration of narratives which are identified as *tattwa*. Thus, rather than attempting to situate either the concept of *tattwa* or narratives identified as *tattwa* within imported theoretical frameworks, my aim here is to develop a contextualised understanding of *tattwa* narratives by looking at what they are and what it is that they do. In other words, *what is it that happens* when *tattwa* narratives are narrated?

Calling *tattwa* narratives ‘stories’ at once produces and interferes with what a non-Balinese audience are able to ‘hear’ when encountering these narratives. In English, the word ‘story’
refers to a narrative which relates an event or series of events, designed to interest, amuse or instruct the listener or reader. It can mean a report or account of something that has happened, a statement, an allegation, a fabrication or even a lie. It can stand in place for words such as legend and fable.

When stories are presented as fiction or hearsay they allow their audience to suspend disbelief. They open up another world and invite us into it. However, when they claim to be true stories, representing real experiences and events, while they may still open up another world to their audience, rather than allow the suspension of disbelief, they instead demand validation. True stories must be amenable to scrutiny. For evidence of this, one need look no further than the public outcry that ensues when ‘true stories’ are discovered to be more closely aligned with fiction than fact39.

The term ‘story’ is productive to our understanding of tattwa narratives - in that we expect stories to open up new worlds, and invite us to identify with unfamiliar characters. However, the idea that stories may be untrue or not real interferes with our ability to understand tattwa narratives. Tattwa narratives, while being unlikely to satisfy demands for empirical evidence of truth, do not incorporate notions of fiction, folktales or fantasy. Thus paradoxically, the implicit invitation that stories make for us to suspend disbelief when confronted with extraordinary concepts and fantastical events, is precisely what serves to distance stories from the truth claims of tattwa narratives.

The multiple meanings attached to the English word ‘story’ lend it an ambiguity that is present whenever the word is used and whatever the intention of the user. I will tell you a story... She told me a story... This is the story of... It’s only a story. It is this ambiguity, this merging of meanings, this ineluctable air of artifice surrounding both the word story, and stories themselves, that make me reluctant to settle for the term story in the context of the narratives that inform this thesis. Tattwa narratives are not ‘just’ stories.

39 For Australian examples see Knox (2004) on the cases of the writers Helen Darville-Demidenko and Norma Khouri.
**Tattwa and Satua**

In Balinese, a distinction is made between fictional, mythological and hearsay stories, which are known as *satua*, and a specific group of cultural narratives, carrying a different set of meanings altogether, which Pak De identified as *tattwa*. ‘Stories’ described as *tattwa* do something that goes beyond providing information, entertainment, or instruction, although they may also do any or all of these things.

In this chapter, I want to further explore Balinese understandings of *tattwa* in order to engender a more explicit academic understanding of the nature of the narratives within the Dissertation and the Screenplay (as well as those that inform them). This exploration is not a quest for information, nor for facts. Rather it is an attempt to ascertain something about the nature of *tattwa*, determine why it is that certain narratives are classified as *tattwa*, and what it is that these narratives do that stories classified as *satua* don’t do. In order to move closer to an understanding of what *tattwa* is, it becomes necessary to determine at the outset what it is not.

**Tattwa is not philosophy**

The Balinese/Indonesian dictionaries I consulted when first attempting to pin down a definition of the word *tattwa* (*tatwa, tatua*) generally glossed it as *pilsafat/filsafat*, the Indonesian word for philosophy or ideology. The Balinese/English dictionaries I checked generally glossed it as philosophy or spiritual teaching\(^4\). Further research revealed numerous Balinese *lontar* with the word *tattwa* in their title which English speaking scholars have translated or defined variably as philosophy, philosophical text, inscription and (religious) teaching\(^5\).

The word *tattwa* is generally considered to be of Sanskrit derivation, encountered in Indian schools of philosophy as *tattva* and translated by terms such as ‘thatness’, ‘truth’, ‘essence’ or ‘fundamental principle’. Different Indian schools of philosophy use the term in varying ways

\(^5\) For example, see references to *Kalatattwa* (Stephen 2002), *Wisnu Tattwa* (Hooykaas 1963), *Wrhaspati Tattwa* (Hooykaas 1973), *Dwijendra Tattwa* (Rubinstein 2000) and others as referred to later in this thesis.
and acknowledge different numbers of *tattva* as being significant. For example, some define *tattva* as the five elements - earth, wind, fire, water, space; some claim that *tattva* represent different aspects of experience; others declare that *tattva* refer to different categories of being or energies; and still others use the term *tattva* to refer to the fundamental principles of a particular philosophy⁴².

One commonly cited understanding of *tattwa* (as for example in texts and websites pertaining to Bali) is as a basic philosophy of Hinduism, of which the following example from the Bali Tourism Board ([http://www.bali-tourism-board...](http://www.bali-tourism-board...)) is fairly typical:

> In practicing their faith, Hindu communities try to achieve a spiritual balance of worship between *Tattwa* (philosophy), *Susila* (morals), and *Upacara* (rituals). These three areas are subdivided into various tenets.

> The Tattwa has five principal beliefs: *Brahman*, the belief in the existence of one almighty god head; *Atman*, the belief in the soul and the spirit; *Samsara*, the belief in reincarnation; *Karma*, the belief in the law of reciprocal actions; and *Moksha*, the belief in the possibility of unity with the divine (*Nirwana*).

However, in a text on Balinese Hinduism, Balinese writer Ngakan Made Madrasuta (1999:27) asserts that ‘*Tattwa* is not philosophy’ (*Tattwa bukan filsafat*). The gist of his argument is that while philosophy is one way of knowing or understanding *tattwa*. However, philosophy describes the product of human rational, critical thinking, whereas *tattwa* essentially refers to knowledge which has been handed down by the Gods. Madrasuta expresses his desire to promote this specific understanding of *tattwa*, which he identifies as Balinese, over a more general Indonesian understanding of *tattwa* as philosophy. However, he still references sources pertaining to Indian Hinduism, such as the Dictionary of Hinduism which identifies *tattwa* as:

> That-ness, or essential nature. In Hindu cosmology tattva are the primary principles, elements, states or categories of existence, e.g.; omnipotent energy, sound, light, time, prana energy, the individual soul, ego, mind, five senses, five physical elements, and so forth (Madrasuta 1999:28).

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Madrasuta, like other writers on Hinduism (for example Hooykaas 1958; Kelly 2002), identifies *tattwa* as deriving from the Sanskrit words *Tat*, meaning That, and *Twa* (*tva*), an ending which like the English ‘ness’ qualifies something, like goodness, but which in some contexts also means God. In contrast, Pak De’s sources (being a combination of *lontar* texts and his own teachers) situate the word *tattwa* within an ancient language known as *Bahasa Dewa Nagari*, which, *along with* Sanskrit, derives from a language known as *Bahasa Dewani*, which in turn descended from *Bahasa Dewa*, or the language of the Gods (Sedana Jan 2010 - unrecorded discussion). I will discuss these languages further in Chapter 3.

What is important here is that there are Balinese sources which, rather than taking *tattwa* to be a word and concept imported from India, attribute both the Balinese and Indian use of the term *tattwa* to a common source. In either case it is only to be expected that, however the word may have been originally defined and wherever linguists trace it back to, its meanings have been interpreted and developed in accordance with specific local knowledges and practices in both India and Bali, thus leading to a plethora of culturally-specific understandings and uses of the term.

**Tattwa is not Satua**

Pak De frequently spoke of *tattwa* when discussing the contents of *lontar*, including in the context of the narratives that inform this thesis, and it was evident that he was using the term to allude to something that encompassed more than philosophy or religious or spiritual teachings, and at the same time referred to something more specific. The more I questioned the word’s meaning, the more apparent it became that there was no single term or phrase adequate to the task of its translation. However, this dilemma was relieved somewhat by the way he continuously situated *tattwa* in opposition to *satua*.

While you are home and you have the chance, ask me anything, and if I know the answer I will tell you. There will be an answer. I can look it up in the literature. Why is something like that? Whenever I speak, I have to be able to take responsibility for my words. So if it is not in the literature, I consider it a story, like *satua* (Sedana 261107).

The Balinese word *satua* covers many of story’s meanings. It refers to the stories people tell about their own lives and experiences, and to stories about things heard from other people. It
applies to hearsay, where the origin of a story is unknown, or to unsourced stories that spread by word of mouth, or that have been written down or recorded in other ways even though some of the details may be unknown, incomplete, embellished, or incorrect. It is used for the Balinese equivalent of the English words legend, fairy tale and fiction. While *satua*, like English ‘stories’, provide a wonderful means of expounding and exploring things outside of our own experience, and for sharing aspects of our experiences and understandings with others, and while they may be ‘true’, they do not *by their very nature* make claims on truth.

In my early fieldwork notes, I wrote:

*Tattwa* are the words of the Gods, the way of the world, the meaning of life, the order of all things living, the messages passed down from the beginning of time, the beginning of the world, the teachings passed down through the generations in the form of *lontar* scripts. *Tattwa* are the *source* of stories, of history, of philosophy, of the way things were and are and will be. *Tattwa* are the words of the world itself. *Satua* are the stories we tell of these things: legends, folk tales, fables, fairy tales. *Satua* are hearsay, *tattwa* the evidence. *Satua* are fiction, *tattwa* the facts. *Satua* belong to everyone, but *tattwa*, like history, like truth itself, are slipperier, more elusive.

Unlike *satua*, which shares enough similarities with story to make it a concept easily grasped by English speakers, understanding what *tattwa* is, as opposed to what it *is not*, presents a greater challenge, demanding as it does a considerable level of culturally specific knowledge. When I asked Pak De why *tattwa* was commonly translated as philosophy, his explanation, unlike my simple summation above, referenced both the order of all life forces and the complex systems of written characters that are the foundations of Balinese scripts.

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*Above Dete Tattwa (Tattwa of plants and similarly classified beings) is Buta Tattwa (Tattwa of animals and similarly classified beings), and above Buta Tattwa is Manusia Tattwa (Tattwa of humans). ... Above Manusia Tattwa is Dewa Tattwa (Tattwa of the Gods). Above Dewa Tattwa is Widhi Tattwa (Tattwa of God). ...*

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*43 Both the individual characters and the scripts themselves are called *aksara*, as too are their non-textual manifestations in the body and the world.*
Philosophy comes from *tattwa*, and the characters called *Makuta Tattwa* come from *tattwa*. That is the oldest system of characters. (The character systems) *Kuta Tattwa* and *Tattwa Makuta* were handed down by those five *tattwa*.

... After the *tattwa* came down they became *Makuta Tattwa*, all the *tattwa*. These *tattwa* handed down philosophy like a bitter pill. ... *pilsafat* means language that is bitter or severe. ...

*Tattwa* contain words that can be accounted for. That is what *tattwa* means. What I am telling you now is *tattwa*. *Tattwa* can be represented by *satua*. When Balinese people tell *satua* it means it can be made up or created using their imagination or using their instincts⁴⁴, or whatever they have. But *tattwa* are based on *pusaka* (sacred texts and objects) or *lontar* or holy words that are said to be handed down by the Gods from the past or from *Zaman Bari* (ancient times). That is *tattwa*. *Tattwa* are *tat tua* (old words). History (*sejarah*) is *tattwa*. *Tattwa* means guidance by those from the past, what they knew and saw, and handed down in *pusaka* or in *lontar perak tembaga* (*lontar* made of bronze) - what they saw, what they knew, and what they can account for, that is called *tattwa*. But when Balinese say *satua*, *satua* can’t be heeded or refuted with words - Oh, this *satua* is wrong. What is this? It is like a summary, a story. A story shouldn’t be judged like that, because someone has used their instincts to create it in order that it is heard or read, so that it can attract attention or attract followers. That is *satua*.

Why are these stories called *tattwa*? Because with *tattwa*, the name of the creator is included. *Iki ngaran lontar Kaki Tua*. This is Kaki Tua’s *Lontar*. Kaki Tua was the caretaker of the Gods who are worshipped at Tanah Lot and the Gods who are worshipped at Pekendungan Temple. This *tattwa* is called *Lontar Kaki Tua*. Kaki Tua was the creator of the *lontar* which talks about those Gods in the current stories. When the story is an approximation then it is called *satua* (Sedana 121007).

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⁴⁴ Pak De uses the Balinese term *insting* to refer to the rational mind as opposed to the type of knowledge that relates to the soul and those teachings that focus on the development of the soul (*Tatanan Roh*) (Sedana 150108).
I began this chapter with a narrative which I presented in the familiar style of a cultural legend in order to demonstrate the dilemma such narratives pose when read as ‘story’. But that is not how that narrative was told to me. Rather, I constructed it by combining several extracts of my fieldwork discussions with Pak De, after having transcribed and then translated them into English. In editing the narrative, I veered from direct translation at times for the sake of fluidity. While this narrative is still technically tattwa, much is also left out - lost - during this process of rendering the raw material into familiar narrative form.

As the text below reveals, while Balinese narratives of the distant past may be textually based, when they are transmitted as living narratives, they are woven together with extra-textual stories, explanation, interpretation and advice as determined by the discursive context of their narration. What Pak De actually told me was as follows:
Don’t compare Balinese Hinduism and Indian Hinduism. They are not the same. They are different. Balinese Hinduism is different. Javanese Hinduism is different. They are totally different. Don’t consider them to be the same. Balinese Hinduism used to be called Bali Kuno (Ancient Bali). And what is referred to as Bali Kuno was the time of Kuno Tattwa (Tattwa of Ancient Times) Kakek Tua wrote about this Bali as Bali Kulina. This Bali had no roots. It could travel to Lombok, it could sail to Java or all the way to Madura, once it even travelled north all the way to the sea of Ancient Mataram. Ancient Mataram was actually Yogyakarta, Java. It was brought right up against it. Kakek Tua experienced the land like that and wondered how to make it strong. Now Kaki Tua had divine powers (kesaktian). He was the King of Snakes (Raja Ular) and the King of Dragons (Raja Naga), so he activated his powers and created one thousand dragon snakes called Naga Sewa or Naga Sarpa. And Bali was held by those snakes, those dragons, they went right down into the sea and tied it down tightly.

Then the Gods came down. Why are you using these snakes, these dragons as roots to hold the land in place?

Well, they can hold the land while they eat and while they sleep so that it isn’t carried all over the place by the currents.

In that case it would be better if you made a stake for the earth.

Because he had the power of Aji Pancaran Bumi (knowledge/power to stake down the land) and Aji Kekuatan Bumi (knowledge/power of the earth’s strength) he sent the dragons home. He brought them back to land and gathered them together. Your task here is finished because I am going to stake the land down, I am going to attach it. And then he attached it. Your Ancestor had Aji Pancaran Bumi, he connected the land at its base, and it attached there.

But once the land was attached, the Gods said, Now that you have attached the land, you have to worship us and seek us from here when you want us. We won’t just come here, you will have to ask us to come. Because it was good when the land could sail around, the Gods liked coming here, it was like riding on a boat.
Anna - So before that they didn’t need places of worship? There weren’t any?

There were none, because they liked this land, they came whenever they liked.

Anna - So they were only made after the land was staked?

Yes, that’s why they made the *Puser Tasik* shrine, they made a place to worship the *Pancar Bumi* (the stake of the earth).

Anna - Where is that?

Every regency has one, there’s one in Tabanan, in Denpasar, in Klungkung, in each regency. They used to have *Sribupati*, which are the same as *Bupati* (district heads), and the leader of leaders was the *Raja Dalem* - now the leader is the Governor - and they built them for each regency. The Gods said to Kakek Tua, Narayana, if you want us to come to earth you can worship us from there, you can make a request. Make places of worship because you have staked down this land.

Anna - They didn’t like the land being fixed down?

No. They didn’t like it. But when the land was like that the people were scared. Where are we going now? the people created by Kakek Tua asked. Where are we going now? So either way he was wrong. If he did what the Gods wanted the people were troubled, they were upset to find all of a sudden they were in Lombok, right up against the coast of Lombok, then a few days later when the wind came up they might be carried all the way to Central Java, to West Java.

Anna – When was this?

In the era when Bali was called *Sawangan Banua*, it replaced *Pulau Dewata* (Island of the Gods) in *Bad Zaman Bari* (the Ancient Times).

Anna - So humans weren’t like they are now?

No.

Anna - What were they like?
You could say they were still simple. Their clothes were made of bark and their burial places were made of stone, not wood. They were placed on the ground. When someone died they made them a stone box, then they would put that into the ground. In those days no one cremated their dead, they would just decay into dust and then they would throw the dust into the sea. They lived for a long time. In those days the youngest people were about 150 when they died. No one died young (Sedana 120107).

The narratives above are tattwa. They come from specific ancient lontar which are dated and have identified authors. Unlike the folktale-style version with which I began, Pak De’s tone is factual, and he uses straightforward language with little embellishment, even when what he is telling me is incredible. There is also a convergence of narratives here, brought about by me asking for elaboration on certain points. While Pak De’s responses to my questions are also based on lontar, the information about the stone burials may well have come from a different lontar than the narrative about the island of Bali being staked to the earth. During the later stages of my field work I regularly asked Pak De which lontar various narratives came from. Not only was he always able to tell me their source, he would often fetch the lontar concerned, turn to the appropriate leaf and read from the passage in question in the language/s in which it was written, interspersed with Indonesian translations. These recitals were uncannily similar to those that took place without recourse to the texts, further evidencing the depth of his familiarity with the contents of all the lontar in his care.

Tattwa are based on the aksara (script) that speaks, on what the aksara say, the relevant aksara. If you say satua, then it means a story or a composition. If it is tattwa then it is a gift or something bestowed by someone else that can be continued on or added to or reduced. That is what tattwa are. Satua are stories. The stories of the animals are like this, the stories of humans are like this. They are just like the folktales that tell us what happened, that is what satua are. Tattwa are a mandate or something bestowed by the Gods or by Hyang Kuasa (the Almighty), or by the Ancestors. That is what tattwa are (Sedana 150107).
Satua are stories made up by people. Tattwa bring things into being\(^{45}\). That is what tattwa and satua are.

Nah, Amukti ta para ning nanak ing ulun, nah catet jani to ning, satua to, kang jagat krama ning ulun, amet ta kita candra ring ngutara muka buminta, kang kara ning jati krama ning ulun. That is the language of the Gods (Basa Dewa)\(^{46}\).

Nah, write this down now in Balinese - bulannya gesal, sasihnya luang, matahari condong ke utara, gerhanalah bulan (on an odd numbered month, when the day is empty/inauspicious, and the sun is in the north, there will be an eclipse of the full moon). That is called tattwa, the words of the Gods written down in the form of lontar or books. That is called tattwa. It tells of what will happen in the future.

Nah, sasih gesal, nini purnama ketuju, sasihnya gesal, harinya kosong, mataharinya condong ke utara, gerhanalah bulan (on an odd numbered day, on the seventh full moon, when the sun is in the north, there will be an eclipse of the full moon).

Patemon tangta kara jata krama ning ulun, weruh kang dati data krama ning uli\(^{47}\).

When the sun is travelling directly to the east and the moon directly to the west there will be a solar eclipse, in one hundred years. People are being told what will happen in one hundred years time, even though humans are lucky if they live for one hundred years (Sedana 150107).

Thus, even when satua are ‘true stories’, they tell of things that have already happened or of things that already exist. In contrast, tattwa tell of things that did/do not yet exist prior to their

\(^{45}\text{dari tiada jadi ke ada} - \text{from nothing to something, or from non existence to existence – as Indonesian has no tenses this phrase can refer to events in the past, present or future.}\)

\(^{46}\text{Pak De did not translate these words when he spoke them, but offered an Indonesian translation at a later date when I asked him to check my transcription which I translate here as: All the changes in human years are written down to remind our descendants what happened that year. The things that have happened, the years of the past, were written down by Kaki Tua to remind us of that time. And this time must be remembered in the future.}\)

\(^{47}\text{Pak De did not translate these words when he spoke them, but offered an Indonesian translation at a later date when I asked him to check my transcription which I translate here as: Do not forget this because these are guidelines for life.}\)
telling, they bring into being what they describe. In other words, *tattwa* are creative, revelatory, transformative, in a way *satua* are not. *Tattwa* not only *tell* us something, they do something, and continue to do that thing throughout time.

**History is *tattwa*, but *tattwa* is not just history**

Pak De said that ‘*Tattwa* are *tat tua* (old words). History is *tattwa*’. However, it is clear that by history he meant the knowledges of the past handed down by Gods and distant Ancestors in textual form. In other words, he was describing ‘Balinese history’ as *tattwa*. This is altogether different from the ‘History of Bali’ as researched and written up in contemporary times based on evidence ascertained from a combination of Balinese, Javanese, Dutch, European and other sources. The Balinese history he referred to is not the History of Bali taught in schools and universities. Neither is it oral history in the sense of oral history being the stories that people pass down through word of mouth alone.

The ways in which Balinese measure, account for and represent time and events of the past are complex and unique. Consequently this subject has attracted considerable attention from non-Balinese scholars, as evidenced by studies of the *lontar* texts in which episodes of the Balinese past, and other forms of knowledge from the past, are inscribed.

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48 My understanding of the creative capacity of *tattwa* was informed by Pak De’s explanations but my thinking about this element of *tattwa* also owes a debt to Jennifer Biddle’s (2007) work on Warlpiri Dreaming Stories, with which *tattwa* narratives bear some similarities.

49 In Bali the distinction between Gods and Ancestors can become quite murky.

50 Wiener (1995:78) reports that when she was researching people’s personal accounts of what happened in the past in Bali, which we might call oral history, she discovered that the matters she was interested in were not considered to be ‘history’ (*sejarah*) at all, but rather ‘*satua*, stories, or *orti*, news, and they enter into discourse as gossip, rumor, reminiscences and anecdotes’.

51 Clifford Geertz’s (1966) analysis of Balinese conceptions of time was highly influential and continues to be taught in university anthropology courses (including in Bali itself, see Hobart 1999:175). However, a later generation of anthropologists have been highly critical of Geertz’s work on Bali, and particularly of this essay, finding it over interpretive, essentialist, and lacking sufficient evidential basis (see Wikan 1990; Hobart 1997, 1999, 2000; Nordholt 1986).

52 Vickers (1990) discusses these studies and the scholars who have undertaken them in some detail. The field of *lontar* studies is extensive, incorporating among other things studies on history, language, literature, performance, healing, religion, magic, performative genres such as drama and song, and the illustrations found in Balinese *lontar*. For some further examples, see Hinzler (1993) for an overview on Balinese *lontar*, Rubinstein (2000), Creese (2004, 1999), Vickers (1982), and Worsley (1990, 1969) on *Kakawin* poetry; Worsley (1972) and Creese (1991) on *Babad*; Zurubchen (1987) and Hobart (2009) on practices and discourse operating around performances derived from particular *lontar*; and Hooykaas (1980) on sacred drawings found in *lontar*. 
Some scholars have paid particular attention to how Balinese understand and represent the past and the challenges this poses to western notions of history. It is to these studies I turn here, in order to explicate that although written historical narratives are understood as tattwa, the tattwa narratives within lontar cannot be reduced to (western perceptions of) history any more than they can be dismissed as folk tales.

My understanding of tattwa derives primarily from Pak De’s references to and explanations of tattwa in relation to the narratives and knowledge systems we discussed. However, my appreciation of tattwa has been enriched by the valuable insights offered by the scholars I draw on below into the different ways in which non-Balinese have used and interpreted traditional Balinese texts, and on the limitations of some of these approaches.

One of the basic obstacles to western interpretations of Balinese texts, as identified by Henke Schulte Nordholt (1992:29), is that western systems consider time to be ‘inflexible and linear’ and history to be a chronological sequence of ‘true facts’. Balinese representations of the past, replete with narratives whose events and characters seem to defy logic and reason, have posed particular difficulties to western ethnographers seeking historical facts (see Vickers 1990; Hobart 1997; Nordholt 1992). Thus, Balinese textual representations of the past have generally been classified either as myths and legends, or as archival records to be combed through by historians in search of facts or evidence of real events. As a result, in Hobart’s opinion, the anthropological debates concerning Balinese perceptions of history, which originated with Clifford Geertz’s (1966) discussion of Balinese calendrical systems, rather than adding to our understanding of the Balinese past, have presented the Balinese as people who lack a proper sense of history (Hobart 1997:153).

Adrian Vickers (1990) argues against the use of dichotomies such as ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’, explaining that Balinese do not share the western concept of fiction, and consider all traditional texts to be ‘true’. He stresses that lontar texts, ‘known as much through hearing or through dramatic and artistic realisations as through reading’, maintain contemporary relevance for Balinese, however, they have been classified in ways which misrepresent the

54 Anthropologists and historians have long wrestled with how to make sense of perceptions of time that differ from their own. In turn, the difficulties of addressing such ‘taken for granted’ concepts as perceptions of time and history has resulted in work in this area being subject to much critique (for instance see Fabian 1983, Casey 1987).
ways in which they are used locally. Only certain texts, such as Babad (often called
genealogical or dynastic chronicles55), have been considered worth mining for historical data,
while other texts have been dismissed altogether due to their ‘mythological’ content. He
suggests that, ‘One way around this dilemma would be ‘to regard all indigenous texts as
“true”, and to write histories in which snake Gods come out of the ground and procreate with
princesses”, but he concedes that this is not a viable solution for historians (1990:4).

Vickers’ concern is with the dilemma faced by culturally-sensitive scholars who aim to
respectfully and appropriately utilise and acknowledge the historical accounts of other
cultures which are not only unfamiliar in form, but which represent perceptions of the world
not shared by the scholar. To this end, he argues (1990:5) for a form of history writing which
incorporates the methodological approaches of literary studies and anthropology, as well as
history, in order to contextualise specific meaning. After bringing this approach to his
analysis of Balinese texts he concludes that:

All narrative or textual events are “true” events, things that have happened in the
past. They can be connected to the present through a sense of causality which
might be called “coincidence” ... making things “coincide” (1990:7).

He finds evidence for his notion of ‘Balinese historical intentions’ in the short
commemorative notes that Balinese scribes have appended to some lontar texts (1990:8). He
explains that when these notes, which are dated, factual and describe relatively recent events,
are added to lontar that are undated, full of ‘mythological’ elements, and describe events of
the distant past, they contextualise the lontar texts and bring them into the present. In what
Vickers describes as ‘a two-way process of contextualizing and historicizing’, the addition of
these notes creates connections between what we might call ‘myth’ and ‘reality’ (1990:5,11).

Nordholt (1992:28) also argues that while there are no separate Balinese literary genres of
‘history’ and ‘fiction’, Balinese demonstrate an awareness of their past through the many
texts that trace the origins of things back in time in order to demonstrate their validity. He
asserts that because Balinese consider that ‘origin and truth are twins’, they believe that
ancient lontar texts reveal the truth of things. In Balinese the point of ancestral origin is

55 The term ‘dynastic chronicle’ was used by Peter Worsley (1972) to describe Babad texts. See also Wiener
known as *kawitan*, and throughout Bali the texts called *Babad* are used to trace ancestral origins as well as to orient people in relation to both the ancestral past and to particular places and events of significance within their ancestral lineage (Nordholt 1992:28; Sedana 150107). Thomas Reuter’s (2002) work supports this perspective, demonstrating how the Balinese communities known as Bali Aga use textual and oral narratives to trace the ‘truth’ of their origins (or *kawitan*) and to determine the relationships of ceremonial responsibility and obligation which bind them to each other and to specific places and temples. While both *Babad* texts, and the type of ‘origin narratives’ Reuter discusses, may appear to non-Balinese to be full of fantastical tales, this is not (to my understanding) how they are perceived by the Balinese who refer to them, as I endeavour to make clear through this thesis.

Like Vickers, Nordholt argues that to understand Balinese representations of the past, it is necessary to adopt approaches from anthropology, literature and history. Rather than mining texts for facts or analysing them for literary merit, they should be understood ‘as a way Balinese look(ed) at their own past, and as a means to reconstruct - and re-phrase - that past in order to make the present meaningful’ (1992:30-32). Thus, he insists that we should endeavour to read texts within the social and political world in which they are embedded (1992:57). In my opinion, this contextualisation also needs to include the (usually) unseen elements of Balinese lifeworlds - the spiritual or supernatural elements - which have proved the most problematic (if fascinating) for non-Balinese audiences.

Hobart (1997:134) argues that a narrative is an act ‘which depends for its completion upon a reader or audience’. This ‘completion’ relies not upon analysis or classification, rather upon our ability to ‘hear’ what the narrator is telling us. But he reminds us that this is no simple task. For how does one determine where the essence of any narrative lies? Is it in the story, the script, in its translation, in what the audience understands by it, and, if so, which members of the audience? As he puts it (1997:145): ‘The question arises: which Balinese terms? And which Balinese, on what occasions? Balinese practices are diverse and vary situationally; and people disagree over their significance and purpose.’

Hobart warns that in drawing conclusions about Balinese representations of the past, many scholars have overlooked the reluctance of Balinese to speak about things which they do not know or are not authorised to speak of (see further Chapter 4). He proposes a locally derived explanation for this reticence to speak:
As the world is continuously changing \textit{(matemahan)}, the past is now \textit{niskala}, ‘non-manifest’. If one does not have access to evidence of what was actually the case \textit{(tattwa)}, it is imprudent to speculate from traces \textit{(laad)} (1997:153)\textsuperscript{56}.

Although he does not specifically address what type of evidence \textit{tattwa} constitutes or what form it takes, Hobart posits access to \textit{tattwa} as a something which authorises Balinese to speak. As I understand it, \textit{tattwa} constitutes ‘evidence of what was actually the case’ by virtue of its acknowledged ability to make the past, \textit{among other things}, manifest in the present. I say \textit{among other things}, because the term \textit{tattwa} is applied to more than just accounts of the past. It is used to describe particular kinds of knowledges - knowledges that while inscribed in textual form in the past, continue to be enacted, maintained and passed down through elaborate teaching and learning systems and through practical application in the present. As such, these knowledges are not knowledges \textit{about} the past, or \textit{of} the past, but rather knowledges \textit{from} the past that are continuously brought into the present.

While my focus here is on \textit{tattwa} narratives, it is important to reiterate that \textit{tattwa} is neither a \textit{category} of narrative nor of the \textit{lontar} from which these narratives derive. Nor does it refer to all narratives in all \textit{lontar}. Rather, \textit{tattwa} is a \textit{quality of certain forms and elements of Balinese knowledges}, some of which are conveyed through the narratives inscribed in \textit{particular} ancient \textit{lontar}.

In other words, \textit{tattwa} bears meanings beyond those that relate to narratives, as Hobart’s comments relating to the translation of a Balinese drama acknowledge (see Conclusion for further discussion):

The term the actors used was \textit{tattwa} ... which tends to be glossed in Indonesian as filsafat, ‘philosophy’. The commentators saw the term here as referring particularly to the background to religious doctrine \textit{(agama)}. \textit{Tattwa} however has broader connotations, which include metaphysical presuppositions (Hobart 2009:10, footnote 56 and see 2000:249, 251).

\textsuperscript{56} Hobart expands on these sentiments in a later paper, stating: ‘Likewise caution is advisable when inquiring about the past, because it too is non-manifest. There are only the traces \textit{(laad)} on the landscape, in written works, in peoples’ memories. They all require inferring what is the case \textit{(tattwa)} from the evidence available’ (1999:185).
In my understanding, *tattwa* narratives do not recite the past as a chronological history of events, nor as a series of myths created in order to explain and interpret events of the historic past. They recite the past as a world with ongoing potency and relevance in which ‘completion’ is achieved through the act of narration (including through dramatic forms of narrative such as dance, drama, song, music, and various art forms which are outside the scope of this thesis). Under the right circumstances, this completion can be experienced as an *encounter with* an enlivened and enlivening past in the present. By this I mean that characters, locations and events of the past are brought to life through their narration and in turn, they enliven the present and the subjects who take part in this narrative encounter.

In the case of the narratives within this thesis, there is a need for both translation and interpretation to bridge the cultural-linguistic space between narrator and audience (being first me, and now you) in order to enable any type of narrative completion at all. I endeavour to embed these translated narratives within dialogue, biography, description, and explanation, in order to transmit something of the world these narratives derive from. However, I cannot, within the confines of a formal academic Dissertation, re-create this experience of ‘enlivened and enlivening encounter’. It is this dilemma which compelled me to write the Screenplay, in the hope that a more performative textual form would be better able to instigate the kinds of affective response that these narratives are capable of producing.

In his own endeavour, Vickers derived inspiration from Paul Carter (1987) who, in his work in Australian history argues for a history which ‘incorporates the cultural intentions of its sources’. Vickers (1990:5) explains,

> First the Aboriginal perceptions can be used to “tell us about the limitations of white history.” Beyond this, however, is the need to meet the terms of what an Australian Aboriginal history might be. This cannot be deduced, Carter says, by acts of “simple imitation” of Aboriginal narratives about the country, but by “something more: A restoration of meaning, a process which cannot avoid being interpretative and imaginative.”

It is a similar process of restoring meaning - through interpretative and imaginative means - that has driven the creative aspect of this Dissertation and the Screenplay. In order to present
tattwa narratives in this thesis, it is necessary to situate them outside of the world in which they are generally enacted, and where they are understood implicitly.

My analysis demonstrates that when tattwa are narrated, they are juxtaposed with stories (satua) in ways which collapses distinctions between past and present. This bears similarities to Vicker’s analysis of the way texts of the distant past and events of the more recent past are brought into co-incidence. His (1990:11) emphasis on the ‘two-way process of contextualizing and historicizing’ is important in relation to the texts he discusses, and to the analysis of Balinese texts in general. However, my own focus on tattwa narratives concerns what occurs through their narration in the present.

If we focus solely on the historical time in which the texts were written we are missing something crucial. For it is the encounter between past and present - between now and then - the simultaneous act of bringing the events, characters and meanings of the past into the present, and making the present count to the past -that enlivens the world, that makes past and present meaningful to each other. Not only do such encounters make Ancestors, places and events of the past meaningful to those in the present, they render their care and responsibility worthy and compelling now. They make the unknown known, the unseen seen, and the past present.

The unseen elements of the world are not invisible to everybody. It is widely accepted in Bali that these elements can be seen by certain people, either intentionally, for example, as a result of training, or unintentionally, for example, through possession or through innate ability. Everyone in Pak De’s family accepts that the ladang where his grandparents once lived is home to a community of unseen beings who live in the trees and help out by working on the farm and protecting it from intruders. Pak De’s grandfather regularly spoke to those beings and instructed them like employees. He was known for his extraordinary abilities and for having undergone the training which enables people to have access to unseen realms and beings. However, one of Pak De’s older sisters was able to see the unseen beings of the ladang ever since she was a child, without any training, and she treated them as her friends. Various members of the family have told me stories of these unseen beings accompanying her when she walked to school or went out to watch a performance at night at a nearby temple.
Some years back, a friend from Denpasar came to our banjar to visit us and we took her for a walk around the temples of Tanah Lot. My friend, usually a vivacious girl, was unusually quiet during this outing. When we reached the car she told us that she had been unsettled by all the Makhluk Halus (unseen beings) in the gardens around the temples, and told us that she had been able to see them for as long as she could remember, although she couldn’t speak with them.

These types of stories are not uncommon, as anyone who has spent any time in Bali will be well aware. They are not considered unbelievable or out of the ordinary. Rather, they are regarded as evidence of the validity of the narratives that permeate the Balinese lifeworld. In turn, the narratives that pervade Balinese lives provide context for and validate such experiences. As indicated earlier, most Balinese encounter these narratives not via direct contact with lontar, but rather through orally transmitted stories, through dialogue and discussion, dance and song and drama and art and ritual, through participating in ceremony, and in contemporary times, at school when studying Balinese culture and religion, and when watching Balinese television.

What is most striking to me, is the way in which these narratives at once create, make present, inspirit - bodies, beings, objects, realms. The act of narration collapses barriers - temporal, spatial, and conceptual - between all of these elements that we might otherwise consider to be separate, disparate, distant. In other words, what these narratives do is to produce an encounter which brings the various elements that make up the (Balinese) world right up against each other. They bring them close together, they make things erat, a word which in this context refers to the closeness, the intimacy, of relationships.
Rice fields and forests near Tanah Lot

As audience, I am caught up in the narratives, I am privy to the dialogue of the actors, be they Ancestors, Gods, animals, unseen beings. I see the landscape they reside in, whether or not I have walked through it myself. The ancient past, the realm of the Gods, the era of distant Ancestors, family histories, the personal experiences of the narrator, the moment of listening, my own presence before and within these narratives - they draw me in, entangle me in events of the past, become part of my world, of my present.

And something else too. Not only do these narratives render the distant past not so distant, they render the fantastical occurrences recounted less incredible. In causing events of the distant past to rub up against the more recent past, and against the present, the credibility of those distant events, so frequently interpreted as fictional or mythological, is reinforced in complex ways. As I will argue, things happen now because the tattwa from the past is enacted in the present.
As audience to these narratives, not only am I situated in a relationship of trust, of respect, of scholarship, which suspends the immediate possibility of disbelief, I am subject to demonstrations which make manifest the type of ‘historical’ knowledge that tattwa narratives purport to transmit. I am forced to believe my own eyes, to literally become a witness to what was and what is feasible still. As a result, my ears hear more, my mind thinks more deeply, my heart expands in the face of new possibilities. A feeling of recognition occurs somewhere deep within me. I am inspired in turn to tell and retell stories in which ‘snake Gods come out of the ground and procreate with princesses’ (Vickers 1990:4).

In the interests of doing this effectively, I am drawn to explore how it is that tattwa narratives enliven events, characters and knowledges, making them present and significant to contemporary audiences; how they describe, create and reinforce relationships of intimacy between the past, present and future; how they actively create relationships between our bodies and the world, between self and others. To this end, it is necessary to look first at the basic element of tattwa narratives: the aksara or characters in which they are inscribed.

Pak De and I at the start of a research session
Chapter 3: Enlivening

In order to explore the enlivening capacity of tattwa narratives it is necessary to understand that the written characters of the ancient lontar from which they derive are inherently potent themselves. The proper articulation of these characters produces real effects in the body and in the world (even when that articulation is silent, and even when all we do is listen).

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the characters ancient Balinese lontar are inscribed in - known as aksara in Balinese (or huruf in Indonesian) - are living characters with enlivening potential, and that these characters are the base of a system of knowledge that produces real effects.

Aksara are characters, letters, words, writing, script. Aksara are urip – life itself. Aksara are the big world and the small world, the earth and the body. Aksara came down with the Gods, they were written on the earth, on the soil, on the rocks. They wrote the grass, the trees, the plants. They wrote the first animals that lived in the swamps, in the sea, in the forests. They wrote human life. They wrote the movements of the earth, the tides and the winds, they wrote the climate and the weather. They wrote the past and the present and the future of the earth and its inhabitants (Fieldnotes 2007).

Just imagine, for a moment, that every living thing in the world is made up of characters (aksara), the type of characters that form sounds, words, sentences, meanings. Imagine that the earth is made up of these characters and so too are our bodies, that both the earth and our bodies are created from and by these characters. Now imagine that the characters of the earth and the characters of our bodies are the same. Imagine that the characters of the wind and the rain, of the grass and the trees, of the mountains and oceans that exist on earth are also present within our bodies. Imagine that this sameness allows for the possibility of resonance,

57 While he mostly spoke to me in Indonesian, Pak De frequently incorporated Balinese terms. In speaking about Balinese characters he used both the Balinese term aksara and the Indonesian term huruf. He also combined language terms, for example, when stressing that huruf adalah urip – ‘characters are life’ – he used the Indonesian word for letters and a Balinese word for life.

58 When speaking in the language of the gods Pak De used the terms jagat ing ulun (big world) and jagat srya ning ulun (small world). In everyday Balinese the terms buana agung and buana alit are used respectively.
the type of resonance attained when two musical instruments hit the same note together. Harmony is achieved, and along with it endless harmonic possibilities.

Imagine that both the characters of the human body and the characters of the earth can be learnt, can be read, can be played, just as a person can learn to read music, to play notes on the piano, then to progress to scales and simple tunes, to listen to the sounds created, to hear what is harmonious and what is discordant, to practice and practice and practice in order that more and more complicated pieces can be mastered.

Imagine that a person who has mastered the characters of the human body, who has mastered the characters of the earth itself, can ‘play’ these characters in such a way as to evoke resonances between one and the other, between one’s own body and the body of another, between one’s own body and the earth itself.

Imagine that these characters are not just part of all living things, they are in themselves both alive and enlivening. Imbued with spirit, they can impart that spirit. We know that words have the power to evoke, to effect, to hurt, to heal. Imagine that this power is inherent in the very characters of the words themselves. That is, aksara are not simply characters, letters, words, which are inscribed in lontar or written in texts. They are the characters of the body - corporeal, visceral, the characters of geography and place - land and sea, and the characters of the world - flora, fauna, elements, life forces.

Characters call out to other characters, sound to sound, words enliven words. When we read and write and learn, we activate the characters within our body. We do this through calling up resonance between the words we write, the words we read, the words we hear, and the characters within our own bodies. Through bringing those characters to life, we keep them active, we stop them from decaying from disuse. In this way we enliven the characters within our body and thus enliven ourselves, we become more than we were - more knowledgeable, more in tune, and dare I say it, happier.

Pak De frequently reiterated that human beings were created on earth complete with deficiencies. According to the teachings he adheres to, our task here on earth, again and again, is to learn as much as we can so that we become capable of correcting our deficiencies.

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59 Manusia itu lengkap dengan kekurangan (for example, Sedana 201007).
In order to correct our deficiencies we need to know ourselves. With self knowledge comes a greater ability to guide ourselves. Once we know and can guide ourselves, we become better able to know others, to know the earth. This self guidance is based on the ability to guide one’s own aksara, an ability which is a stepping stone towards learning to read the aksara of others, and of the earth. Advanced knowledge of aksara enables more complex interactions still. I have watched Pak De whistle up the wind as one might whistle up a pet dog. ‘Swttt, swttt, swttt,’ he holds out his hand, ‘Look at the mango tree over there. Watch what happens to it when I call up the wind. Swttt, swttt, swttt’ (Sedana 010108).

Coincidence, you may be thinking. An illusion conjured up by the power of suggestion. My own brain, trained in the logic and reason of western science, sought out similar explanations even as it marvelled to bear witness to something previously unimaginable. I now understand that Pak De’s ability to interact with elements of the natural world, among numerous other incredible abilities, is the result of teachings such as those referred to above, is the result of his mastery of the tattwa of ancient lontar which itself is dependent on his mastery of the aksara they are inscribed in. It is the knowledge thus gained that enables him to ‘guide’ the characters within the small world of his own body, and through those characters, to effect the characters within the greater social and physical world.

One of the many elements of lontar through which Balinese knowledges are gained, maintained and transmitted is through mantra. Variously glossed as spells, magical formulas, sacred words, prayers, and chants, mantra are generally understood to consist of a string of words and syllables, that when recited, whether out loud or internally, set up vibrations, or resonances within the body, regardless of the speakers understanding of the words or sounds uttered. As I understand it, Balinese mantra derive from texts that are composed of aksara and their efficacy comes from those aksara.

Pak De’s capacity to whistle up the wind derives from his internalisation of the mantra that activates the characters, the aksara of Dewa Bayu, (God of Wind), an energy force residing both within our bodies and within the world. He can call up the earth’s wind because by calling up the winds within his own body he is able to activate resonance between their aksara. Swttt, swttt, swttt.
Whether or not we ‘believe’ that such things are possible, we can recognise that the very practice of learning aksara, of learning and incanting mantra, and of striving towards such a high level of ‘self-guidance’ that such practices suggest is indicative of a focus on spiritual development. However, while Pak De often speaks about the differences between academic (rational, bodily) and instinctive (intuitive, spiritual) knowledge, he does not consider that rational and spiritual development need be in opposition to each other. Despite his grandfather’s conviction that the pursuit of academic knowledge caused instinctive abilities to retreat, making spiritual development more difficult, he remains convinced that it is both possible and desirable to develop mind and soul simultaneously. His greatest wish is that his children, myself included, develop their academic abilities as much as they are able regardless of the degree of spiritual development they might seek.

Your great grandfather thought that if I went any further at school, I wouldn’t want to become a helper,\textsuperscript{60} become a balian, but that is not true. If I had undertaken further study, become a doctor or an engineer, then people could say, oh, that balian is an engineer (Sedana 031207).

He constantly urged me to never stop studying, stressing the value of learning for the sake of acquiring knowledge, of becoming wiser, of activating the aksara of the body. He also assured me that any doubts I had about my abilities to do justice to the material he was sharing with me were in fact productive. Doubt, or awareness of the limits to my knowledge, was precisely what would keep me asking questions, seeking further information, checking and rechecking what I write before I am satisfied with the results. But he also urged me to trust my own intuition regarding the direction my research and writing was taking. Yes, he told me, it is good that you are writing stories. It is good that you want to write about the knowledge of our Ancestors. You are doing all this, you are here, now, asking these questions, because it is part of your destiny to do so. Other members of our family also expressed the belief that my role in researching and recording the stories of the Ancestors, and my presence in the family which enabled me to do that, was tied up in my destiny, and in the destiny of the family as a whole.

\textsuperscript{60} Pak De frequently used the term penolong (helper), rather than balian, to refer to his occupation.
Still, when Pak De told me he was going to teach me a *mantra* that would help me both in my life and with the work ahead of me, I was surprised. Knowing that he didn’t train women *balian*[^61], I had assumed he didn’t teach women at all (an unreasonable assumption given how much he had taught me, had shown me already). I was also thrilled, because I had become increasingly interested in the potency of *aksara*, including its role in *mantra*, and felt that some practical experience would help me understand this better. I didn’t have any expectations, and I didn’t have any guidelines. I was simply told to come to Pak De’s home on a particular day and to bring a notebook.

On the predetermined day, Pak De explained that the *mantra* he would teach me could be learnt independently of the traditional systems of knowledge through which he generally teaches students, and that its intention was to increase self-knowledge in order to be better able to ‘read’ other people and their intentions towards one’s self. He introduced and named the *mantra*, then slowly recited it to me, giving me time to write the words down phonetically. He looked over what I had written to make sure my rendition was correct, and told me to find the space and time to read it, either out loud or inside my head, eleven times a day without stopping. I was to continue doing so until such a time as I had memorised it, and felt that it had become part of me.

When I asked him what the words meant, he was happy to explain them, but told me that I didn’t need to understand what they meant for them to have efficacy. Because the sounds carried their own potency, their translation was unimportant, unnecessary. This intrigued me. *How could a sequence of sounds with no known meaning recited internally to oneself have potency?[^62]*

**The birth of *aksara***

If you really want to know the characters it is not enough just to read them, you need to know how they act and where they come from (Sedana 040108, quoting Kak Batu Ngang).

[^61]: The reasons for this are complex and not relevant to this thesis.
[^62]: Zurbuchen’s (1987) work on the language of Balinese Shadow Theatre pays particular attention to the relationship between writing and sound, and Rubinstein’s (2000:43-60) work on *Balinese alphabet mysticism* constitutes an in-depth exploration of the connection between sounds and parts of the body.
The most basic elements or forms of all Balinese aksara are known as krakah. Krakah forms combine in various ways to form the characters that make up Balinese aksara. However, Pak De explained that aksara consists of numerous different character systems which are composed of different krakah. For example, Krakah Sari are the basis of the characters of human and earthly languages, whilst Krakah Dewa are the basis of the characters of the language of the Gods (Bahasa Dewa).

Example of krakah characters.

On their own, krakah are elements of characters and do not have the ability to speak, move or act. They cannot say anything. In order to speak, they need first to join up with other characters. Balinese school children are generally only taught to read and write the character system called Karuna Lingga which consists of characters that can already speak. However, they don’t learn the krakah this system is formed from. A person proficient in Karuna Lingga can read and articulate its characters and perhaps even write them. However, knowledge of Karuna Lingga alone does not enable someone to read the aksara used in ancient Balinese lontar, because both the character systems, and the krakah that the characters are comprised of, are different.
Because there are numerous character systems used in ancient lontar, a thorough knowledge of the different forms of krakah is required in order to identify and differentiate between character systems and thus correctly read, articulate, and understand the contents of the lontar.

As well as being written in different character systems, ancient lontar contain different languages which themselves may be inscribed in several different forms. To give an example, Bahasa Dewa refers to the language of the Gods as it occurs within the realm of the Gods, Bahasa Dewani refers to the language of the Gods as it is written in its earthly form, and Bahasa Dewa Nagari refers to transliterations of Bahasa Dewani. In lontar texts, Bahasa Dewani is generally transliterated into Balinese character systems (aksara Bali), however, the term Bahasa Dewa Nagari can also be used to refer to the transliteration of Bahasa Dewani into the script of any human language.

Unlike the characters of the Karuna Lingga system of writing taught in schools, the characters that make up Bahasa Dewani not only speak, they also think and move and act. They have their own potency and that potency is carried by the articulation of those characters even once they have been transposed into, for example, Latin scripted Balinese, Indonesian, or English, or into the scripts of other languages such as Japanese or Thai. A mantra that was originally inscribed in Bahasa Dewa Nagari has potency whatever script it is written in because its articulation remains the same, and this potency is present whether the words and syllables it consists of are articulated out loud or reiterated internally.

I have come across claims that many of the sounds that mantra consist of are meaningless syllables, but my own understanding based on discussions with Pak De is not that the words of mantra lack meaning, but that their primary significance lies beyond the meaning of the words. Rather it lies in the capacity of those words/sounds to produce resonance within the particular parts of the body in which corresponding aksara reside.

Whenever Pak De read to me or quoted from memory tattwa narratives or other excerpts from lontar that were written in the language of the Gods (Bahasa Dewa or Bahasa Dewani),

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63 I am aware that other scholars have listed some of the styles and genres of Balinese texts and the languages they are written in, for example see Creese (1996:38), Rubinstein (2000: 10, 14) but these lists differ from the kinds of language descriptions Pak De gave me.

64 Rubinstein (2000) discusses these correspondences in some detail.
he would follow up with a translation into what he called ‘human language’ (Bahasa Manusia), which for my benefit was generally Indonesian. Despite my inability to understand the language of the Gods in any form, he never skipped straight to the translation. I have come to understand that this is because, as with mantra, the articulation of the original words of tattwa matter. It was important that I hear those words, that their characters be allowed to call out to the characters within my own body. Thus whether or not I understood what those words meant, whether or not he translated or explained them, some level of internal resonance was enabled.

In the notebooks Pak De used to record his studies of various lontar during the 1970s, he also transcribed the original forms of the characters of the language of the Gods (aksara Dewa) as they appear in the lontar, even when he then recorded transliterations and explanations in more accessible Balinese character systems. This was necessary because while the language of the Gods can be translated into human languages and scripts, its characters can only be articulated in the language of the Gods, and, as mentioned previously, this language can be inscribed using both earthly and Godly character forms. The study of lontar texts is thus extremely complex. Confusion and misinterpretation of ancient texts is possible even by lontar experts. Unless the lontar reader really understands the language system that governs the characters in question, then those characters will not be able to speak (bersuara), and therefore the reader will not be able to articulate them properly. The characters themselves remain potent, but their potency cannot be activated.

To try and make this clearer, very few people would know how to articulate the character below because it has so many krakah forms affixed to it, ‘it has a suku, it has a taleng, it has a tedong, it has a surang, it has a pepet, it has a danya’ (Sedana 040108). These italicised words are the names of the different krakah forms attached to the base character to give the overall character its sound. The reason that most people cannot read this character is because it contains language codes particular to Bahasa Dewani and Bahasa Dewa - the language of the Gods as it occurs in both its earthly and Godly realms.

65 Rubinstein (2000:30) points out of lontar written in Sanskrit, Kawi and Balinese that, ‘The greater the supernatural potency of the contents of the writings in these languages, the fewer the number of literates’.
The name of the character sounds like this, *Kriam Dantam Dewantam*. It means, I am handing down this sacred text (*pusaka*) so that humans will know the language of the Gods and can aim to join the Gods (Sedana 040108).

Characters like this, as well as being unfamiliar and unreadable to most people, also refer to things that are outside of most people’s knowledge and abilities. This character is actually a *mantra* called *Aji Ikatan Roh*, which translates as Knowledge/Power for ‘Harnessing the Human Soul’, and relates to the practices of high level *balian*. Because there are thirteen parts to this character it is impossible for most people to read it. This also means that there is no danger of an unconsecrated layperson misusing it.

People say, ‘Don’t tell anybody because it has spiritual potency. Every time you say it someone’s soul will be tied up’. We only say this *mantra* if someone’s soul is loose because it was taken away by someone else and we need to draw it away and put it back inside that person. But even if someone looked at this a hundred times, what does it sound like? They couldn’t say it because it has so many characters.

The *lontar* that are most commonly known are the *lontar* called *Kanda Tattwa* or *Makuta Tattwa*, *Kuta Makuta Tattwa* or *Kuta Tattwa*. Those are the oldest characters. People rarely know the ones above them, such as *Aji Tata Tandalini*. *Aji* means knowledge that is *tattwa* (Sedana 040108).

To summarise, the *lontar* called *Aji Ikatan Roh*, from which the character above comes, describes the characters of the soul itself (*aksara roh*). A person who studies and masters this *lontar* gains particular knowledge pertaining to the human soul that enables them to interact in specific ways with the souls of other people. This knowledge is inscribed in *Bahasa Dewa* (the language of the Gods), thus its characters are formed from *Krakah Dewa*. The character shown above is written in its original Godly form and has not been translated into its earthly script. The reason that Pak De can read and pronounce and understand this character and the
other characters within the *Lontar Aji Ikatan Roh* is because he knows *Krakah Dewa* and the rules that govern the character system of *Bahasa Dewa*. He can also read, articulate and understand the *Lontar Aji Ikatan Roh* because he has been through the requisite study and training that enables someone to safely and appropriately access and utilise the knowledge contained within. As he put it, Other people who look at these characters may ask, `Why can’t I read this Balinese writing? Because it is forbidden for you to read it’.

The following photograph shows how many characters are required to transliterate the *Aji Ikatan Roh* character in the top left corner, which I presented separately on the previous page, into the human characters of Balinese *aksara* (or *Basa Dewa Nagari*).
The reason I am providing you with this level of linguistic detail is because when I asked Pak De just how it was that a sequence of sounds with no known meaning recited internally to oneself could have potency, he answered by referencing the character systems and the order of characters:

Within the character systems of aksara first comes Krakah, then Gerigah Geriguh, then the Trikuna characters which join things together, then Karuna Lingga, characters which can speak. Before they can speak and act the characters are called Anda Kanda Tattwa. After these come the characters called Anda Tattwa, which can walk and speak and act. Then come the characters called Anda Tata Nandalini, which can make connections between other characters. Then come the characters called Makuta Tattwa, and then come Anda Kanda Makuta Tattwa. Only after someone knows those characters can they learn the characters called Catus Pata Mono Sewu, the hundred thousand characters in the human body (Sedana 301107).

In other words, if someone wants to really understand high level, ancient aksara, they need to understand its origins, its foundations, starting with its most basic components and working up from there. Each of the character systems Pak De describes can be likened to a ‘level’ that should be mastered before moving on to the next character system. Pak De likened the development of the character systems to the development of human beings. He described krakah as characters which are like new born babies, incapable of doing anything on their own, whereas the characters of Gerigah Geriguh are like toddlers, only capable of staggering about. In turn, the characters of Karuna Lingga can speak, but they are not able to say anything very complicated and, like children, they are still unable to do anything on their own.

The mantra Pak De taught me consists of characters known as Anda Tattwa, and these are characters which ‘can walk and speak and act’. They embody Aji (knowledge/ power -see Chapter 4) which mean they are tattwa, and thus they have their own potency. Whether or not the person articulating these characters understands what they mean, they are capable of acting on the body because their articulation engenders resonance with corresponding characters within the human body.
The spirit of *aksara*

It is not the *krakah* or the character system that engenders resonance between characters, but the *spirit of the characters* themselves.

Humans have souls, animals, trees, unseen beings have souls. *Aksara* have spirits.
When their spirit connects with another spirit then their spirit will fuse with that *aksara* (Sedana 241207).

Every *aksara* character has its own spirit, which is called its *haura*. It is this *haura* that gives the characters of *mantra* their potency. The characters of the body have their own *haura* and when the characters of the *mantra* find their place within the characters of the body, there is resonance between the *haura*, and those internal characters are activated, enlivened.

It is difficult to find people who know the real meaning of the human characters because *arang wong weruh*, because the Gods have only provided a few people with the knowledge of those characters. *Apan ayu werewa pingit akena juga arang wong weruha*. That’s what the *Tattwa Dewani* says, that’s what the Gods said. Before you know *tata titi krama ning manusa*, *tan weru keto para ning aksara iki* - Before you can read, master, absorb and feel those characters, you must not speak or write them. That’s what the Gods said about the *Catus Pata Mono Sewu*. They are the characters of the body, right down to the innermost heart itself. They are there within the very depths of the heart, because this world is the same as your world (Sedana 301107).

Keeping Pak De’s teaching in mind, I applied myself to finding a quiet space, a quiet moment in the day, in order to recite my *mantra*. Each day I read through the *mantra* eleven times without interruption, marking a notch in my notebook to keep track. Soon the unfamiliar words began to flow together and I no longer needed to refer to my notebook. Eleven times is not so many, not enough to merit the use of *aksamala* beads. I could close my eyes and count them off using all my fingers plus one. By this stage I experienced the *mantra* as meditative, its recitation took me to a peaceful place within myself and from there I could relax into a kind of limbo from which I always emerged feeling refreshed, energised. Then one evening, several weeks after I began reciting the *mantra*, something else happened, as I recorded in my fieldnotes (091207):
We know that language can cause physical responses, that emotions result from words spoken by ourselves and others, that physical, bodily sensations are experienced as a result of our sensory perceptions -we see, we feel, we hear, we feel, we taste, we feel, we speak, we feel. What is the power of words themselves? No doubt much has been written on this topic but I am amazed yet by the sensations that arise in my body as a result of uttering words in a language I don’t even know. The power of the mantra is the power of the words themselves, they find their place in the very words that reside in our own body. They speak to the body and through the body they are activated. They enliven those words in the body and the sensation is incredible, a slow, subtle but definite buzz that spreads surely through me, like the rush of blood through the body after vigorous exercise.

How is it that those words cause such an effect? Those words have their own power and they release that power within the body by being uttered again and again and again until they take place.

The first time I experienced this strange buzz, I was reluctant to attribute it to the mantra, even as it seemed the only explanation. That night I couldn’t sleep for hours. I thought it must be the heat, my feet were so hot I got up twice to rinse them down with cold water. The next night when I experienced both the post-mantra buzzing, and the hot feet, I had to consider the possibility that these sensations did relate in some way to the mantra. I never experienced the hot feet again, but the pleasurable buzzing continued for a couple of weeks before gradually being replaced by a more generalised state of relaxation.

And something stranger still. One afternoon, in a state between mantra induced meditative state and sleep, I saw an image of an old pair of eyes before I slipped into a dream in which my young cousin, Edy, Pak De’s son, showed me an aksara tattoo engraved on the right side of his tongue. Being unable to read aksara, I asked Nyoman to read it for me and he told me it meant bird. It was a strange dream, the type that feels almost real, and it stayed with me enough that I mentioned it to Pak De the next time we met.
A – The other day after going home from here I dreamt that Edy had a kind of tattoo on his tongue. On the right side of his tongue there was an aksara tattoo. Nyoman read it for me and told me it said bird. It was very strange. It was the characters for bird. Perhaps I was thinking about him being sick the other day.

No. It is true. If it was the characters for bird then it is true. Edy is the reincarnation of someone who had divine power (sakti), and because I asked that those powers be brought to earth he was given those characters when he was a baby.

A – On his tongue?

Yes, on his tongue, on the right side of it.

A – How could I dream that?

It means that it has sunk in.

A – I wanted to ask you about it because it felt as though it was real, even though I was only asleep for a moment. I dreamt that Edy had that writing, but you are saying that he really does?

He really does. That is called dreaming reality (mimpi kenyataan). ....

A- Does me dreaming that relate to what you taught me, to the mantra?

It is the mantra that can see.

A- Does that relate to me being able to dream something...?

Yes. Before you can see clearly, you can know things via dreams ... that was your soul that saw that. You asked Nyoman to read it, and Nyoman could read it because he has already studied the characters that I gave you (Sedana and Nettheim 031207).

Tattwa narratives are potent because they derive from lontar written in aksara (characters) which have the power to make things happen. They make things happen by calling up resonance between textually-based aksara, and the aksara (characters) in the body, and, through those bodies, in the aksara (characters) of the earth. Mantra, through which tattwa
are also transmitted (albeit more cryptically), provide a good example of the way this resonance is enacted. As with *mantra*, the enlivening capacity of *tattwa* narratives lies in the spirit of the characters themselves and their ability to connect with the spirit of the characters of the body and of the world. Through the reiteration of *tattwa* narratives, the ‘words of the world’ can resonate within new bodies, creating new relationships of intimacy between people and those elements of the world which are articulated.

Nyoman helps Pak De put the *lontar* away after Hari Saraswati
Chapter 4: The body and the world

It can be quite dangerous to approach the aksara and the knowledge they contain without basic preparation in the mystic aspects of linguistic meaning. The lontars, like other sakti, ‘powerful, magically endowed’ objects in Bali, are possessed of an ambivalent power that is beneficial or harmful depending on the conditions under which that power is activated (Zurbuchen 1987:59).

Sakti

In the last chapter, I argued that the enlivening capacity of tattwa narratives derives from their textual origins (the textual characters or aksara of ancient lontar). As I understand it, tattwa narratives are potent and efficacious because the lontar texts they come from are sakti. However, to complicate this further, those lontar texts are imbued with sakti because they inscribed with aksara that are sakti. In this chapter, I explore how Balinese notions of sakti relate to the efficacy of tattwa narratives and some of the ways in which the potential danger of lontar are regulated.

Sakti is a complex and contested concept which has been subject to much analysis by scholars interested in Balinese knowledges. The understanding of sakti I draw on here is primarily informed by discussions with Pak De. In the context of this discussion, I define sakti as a spiritual power or essence which may be inherent to the person, agent or object imbued with it, but which can also be acquired, developed, strengthened and activated in a variety of ways. Both lontar and aksara are deemed to be imbued with sakti, and this powerful and ambiguous force renders them dangerous to those who have not undergone appropriate training and preparation.

Not all aksara or all lontar are dangerous. As I explained in the previous chapter, the aksara taught in schools can ‘speak’ but is unable to do anything and is thus benign. A great many lontar have been made publically available without any apparent problem. This is evidenced by the large numbers of lontar that have been gathered into both public and private libraries, museums and manuscript collections, and made available to local and foreign scholars for

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66 For example, Lovric (1987), Connor (1986), and Wikan (1990) discuss the concept of sakti in relation to their work on balian, and Rubinstein (2000) and Zurbuchen (1987) in relation to their work on lontar and aksara.
research purposes, and for the purposes of translation, digitalisation, and publication\textsuperscript{67}. Many lontar have been reproduced as publications and there are increasing numbers of lontar available for perusal online in photographic form along with Balinese, Indonesian and/or English translations\textsuperscript{68}. Visitors to Bali can even purchase lontar written in Balinese aksara to their own specifications. However, there are also lontar that remain inaccessible, due to the nature of their contents and the aksara they are inscribed in. It is these lontar that are considered unsafe in the wrong hands.

As should be apparent from the previous chapter, mastering the different forms of aksara and the various language codes in which lontar are inscribed is a difficult and time consuming process. It is a task Balinese do not take lightly. Lontar which are sakti derive their ‘spiritual power’ from the powerful spirits (haura) of the aksara they are inscribed in. It is the aksara that are the ‘living’ element of lontar. The danger associated with lontar and aksara lies in the potentialities of unguided resonance between the spirit of powerful aksara and the spirit of the characters within the human body. Therefore, while anybody can tell the stories that derive from lontar narratives, an accurate rendition of the written version of tattwa narratives requires a particular teller who has had sufficient training to not only read and interpret the character systems they are inscribed in, but to temper the potency of the characters. In addition, those who are capable of accessing such lontar with impunity should also be able to provide evidence of their potency as deemed appropriate or necessary, as Pak De frequently did for me.

\textsuperscript{67} For example, Gedong Kirtya Lontar Museum and Library (http://www.northbali.info...; http://northbali.org/buleleng...), the Lontar Library at Udayana University’s Faculty of Arts (http://www.fs.unud...), The University of Leiden’s Manuscript Collection (Hinzler 1986-7), the Australian National University’s Balinese Manuscript Collection (http://anulib.anu...).

\textsuperscript{68} See for example http://www.babadbali......, http://www.ringingrocks.org...
Lontar Tampak Kuntuling Ngalayang – The tracks of a flying bird

Making the *aksara* visible
Injunctions

Specific lontar texts are marked as powerful or sakti via injunctions inscribed within them against their unauthorised use and dissemination. The idea that the power these texts hold is potentially malevolent is reinforced through stories that warn of the consequences of ignoring such injunctions. While granting me permission to speak about tattwa narratives and make public those that appear in this thesis, Pak De stressed that many lontar are pingit akena juga, ayua wera arang wong weruha. That is, these lontar should be read - and their contents transmitted - with care.

The issue of textual restrictions has been well recorded by scholars of Balinese lontar. For example, Zurbuchen (1987:61) notes that sanctions such as ‘haywa wéra or aja wéra’ which she translates as ‘do not reveal/divulge’ are understood as a means of restricting particular types of powerful knowledge to people who have done the appropriate degree of study to receive that knowledge. Rubinstein (2000:3) translates the same phrase as ‘do not disseminate’, and points out that this injunction ‘has for centuries restricted the circulation of esoteric, specialist texts to the uninitiated (people who are not qualified to receive and handle their teachings).’

While increasing numbers of lontar are currently being made accessible\(^6\), my discussions with Pak De suggest that there may be more restricted texts in Bali than previously thought, and verifies the weight such injunctions continue to carry. For instance, large numbers of Balinese Babad texts have been made publically available\(^7\), and previous research has indicated that Babad texts are unrestricted and contain no injunctions (Rubinstein 2000:37). However, according to Pak De, three of the six volumes that make up the Babad Kundalini contain written injunctions that restrict them to members of the descent group they refer to.

The lontar that can be read start from Dwijendra Tattwa. Dwijendra Tattwa is 400 years old, or maybe 500 years old. The ones called Dang Kahyangan - Sad Kahyangan, Asta Kahyangan, Dasa Kahyangan - those four lontar can be read


\(^7\) For example see http://www.babadbali.com/pustaka/babad/daftar-ringkasan.htm for a long list of Babad texts available online in Indonesian translation.
by anyone. But above those are the lontar called Purana Tattwa and Babad Kundalini Bad one, two and three. Bad four, five and six can be read, but Bad one, two and three can’t. They cover different saka years. ... Those in circulation now, in the libraries, in the universities, the museums, are four, five and six, not one, two and three. Those are only at home (Sedana 171206).

The collection of lontar referred to as the Babad Kundalini name all the descendants of Kaki Tua down to the time of the introduction of the Hindu lunar or saka calendar to Bali. These lontar contain accounts of what people in each generation have achieved - what they studied, and what they learnt. Specifically, they account for the aji (knowledge/power) attained by Ancestors in order that this knowledge be passed down to descendants. This is significant because the lontar in which the aji attained by Ancestors is inscribed, are passed down within this same descent group, members of whom have traditionally held responsibility for monitoring access to that knowledge.

Pak De can read any lontar that he encounters because he was trained by his grandfather from a very young age to read the ancient forms of aksara in which ancient lontar are inscribed. Both this ability, and the associated long term, intensive program of study and training he went through under the guidance of his teachers, has enabled him to achieve a high level of aji/ilmu. He has access to these powerful lontar because they are in the guardianship of his own descent group. He is responsible for monitoring access to the knowledge within them, both because he is the successor to their previous guardians, and because as a result of his

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71 I was told these are all included in the Lontar Babad Kundalini Bad 6.
72 Pak De tells me that prior to the introduction of the saka calendar (the Indian lunar calendar), Balinese measured time in 1000 year periods known as bad. 2009 is saka year 1931.
73 The Hindu saka year was first used in India in 78 AD (Gonda 1975:3; Phalgunadi 1991:151), although this is often cited as the date in which it was introduced to Bali. Phalgunadi (1991:151) states that the saka calendar was first used in Bali in 906 AD.
74 Other more recent texts record descendants of Kaki Tua since that time.
75 Previously I noted that aji and its Indonesian equivalent ilmu are used to refer to both particular lontar-based knowledge and the power derived from activating that knowledge. For example, Aji Mata Dewa refers to lontar teachings on how to be able to ‘see the Gods and all they are present in’ as well as the power to do so. Pak De also uses the term ilmu more generally to identify the kinds of esoteric knowledge/power that the work of balian utilises. These types of knowledge and the powers derived from them are referred to by a number of different phrases which are generally set up in binary opposition to each other. For example, the terms Ilmu Lanas (male knowledge/power) and Ilmu Panengen (right sided knowledge/power) which refer to the same thing, are often called Ilmu Putih or ‘White Magic’, and the terms Ilmu Wadon (female knowledge/power) and Ilmu Pangiwa (left sided knowledge/power) are frequently called Ilmu Hitam or ‘Black Magic’. However, the Balinese categories of knowledge/power these terms refer to are far less black and white than these terms suggest, and include a third category of Ilmu Kedi, knowledge which like the hermaphrodite (kedi) is neither male nor female (Sedana 021107).
studies and training he has attained the mantle of Mangku Penyarikan76. Of particular relevance here is Pak De’s knowledge of the Lontar Catus Pata Mono Sewu, through which he became familiar with the hundred thousand characters of the human body. It is this knowledge that Pak De considers to be appropriate preparation for directly accessing lontar which are sakti and the tattwa within without negative consequence.

Self-activation

Lontar (and other objects) which are sakti have inherent powers which can be activated by people with the right abilities. However, one of the reasons they are considered dangerous in the wrong hands is because that power can also be self-activating. Items which are sakti are sacred and volatile because they have agency: the capacity to exert power on their own77. The quality of sakti indicates that the text, the object, the place, the person imbued with it has powers that are capable of acting towards their own self preservation, as the following story, from relatively recent times, asserts.

The Dutch Queen wanted to take the Lontar Pustaka Raja, when it was at the farm. One of her officers from Java came, his name was Marjuki. He came to Tanah Lot from Denpasar to ask for the Pustaka Raja, because in Bali there was only one Pustaka Raja and they had none in their country. The Queen’s soldiers couldn’t take it, even though they were close. It was kept in the realm of the unseen (alam maya) so they couldn’t take it. They could see it, but it was kept in that mystical realm (alam gaib) so people couldn’t take it. Only after independence did Kumpi take it back and no longer kept it in the mystical realm. According to Kumpi, if the Pustaka Raja had been taken by the Dutch, then Bali would have lost half of its power, because the other lontar under it would have gone too. At least some of them would have gone to Holland, that’s what Kakek said. That is why he held onto it. Finally Marjuki got angry and fired a shot from about 50 meters away. He fired a shot but he was the one who was shot. He died immediately beside the farm, in someone else’s rice fields. He fired the shot in the farm, on the southern slope, but he was shot, dorr, his own body was shot.

76 Balinese traditions of knowledge transmission are the subject of a larger research project to which this thesis on tattwa could be considered a prelude.
77 Agency, as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary http://www.merriam-webster.com
The bullet was this big. The wound was only this big at the front, but Kakek said it was ten centimetres at the back. He said, How could the person firing the gun get shot? Because that mystical energy turned the bullet around. It halted the bullet and sent it back. Dorrr, he was shot. After that the Queen said, she spoke to Kumpi in Dutch, Okay Kek, I won’t disturb your peace, but allow me to rule here in Bali as is my destiny. Kumpi spoke Dutch well (Sedana 171107).

This narrative attests to the self-activating, capricious spiritual power or sakti of the Lontar Pustaka Raja. It reiterates the importance of keeping this lontar and the knowledge it contains safe and in the care of those who hold responsibility for it. Note also that Pak De refers to his grandfather by both the terms Kakek, meaning (my) grandfather, and Kumpi, meaning (your) great grandfather. In this way he emphasises my relationship with an unknown family Ancestor and thus incorporates me into this story of the past. Thus it becomes a story Pak De tells me about ‘our Ancestors’. As well as enlivening the ancestral lands of the farm (ladang) where the event occurred, it adds another layer to the efficacy of tattwa narratives, further binding together Ancestors and descendants, past and present, seen and unseen, people and place.

**Challenges**

Pak De himself did not simply accept the cultural dictum that lontar are sakti, that they have inherent potency. Rather, he set out to discover whether these claims had any basis by experimenting with the materiality of lontar himself. He was a sceptical student in spite of the unique environment in which he grew up, where matters that others may perceive as being mystical or supernatural were taken for granted. Unwilling to accept the validity of any claim without evidence, including those made by the lontar themselves, he set out to test those qualities attributed to lontar.

It is widely accepted that lontar decay quickly in Bali’s tropical climate and that at best they can expect a life span of a couple of hundred years. All the literature I have read on lontar has referred to their short life span, and state that they need to be recopied, reproduced, rewritten in order that the knowledge they contain can be maintained and passed down to future generations. As the literature notes, the recopying of lontar by different hands, different minds, with different abilities and varying intentions, invariably results in alterations to the original source, and at times even radical transformations (for example see Rubinstein

Some Balinese readers of *lontars* maintain that the more a manuscript is read, the longer it will last, and frequent handling does seem to give a certain patina and flexibility to the leaves, forestalling the drying and cracking of deterioration.

Although this explanation for the longevity of *lontar* seems perfectly plausible, Pak De had a very different explanation for the durability of *lontar* that are regularly handled and read. While he is well aware of the practice of copying and reproducing *lontar*, he maintains that this is not necessary when the *lontar* concerned are *sakti*. He avows that there are many ancient Balinese *lontar* dating back to the pre-saka era (that is, prior to 78 AD) that are incapable of decay, although he confessed that he once had trouble believing this himself.

Those *lontar* are centuries old and are undamaged. Because the person who wrote and created those *lontar* was incredible they are imperishable. It’s like this, ancestral texts that were not made by someone with divine powers (*kesaktian*) are not *sakti*. No matter how clever they were, if they weren’t *sakti*, the scripts are not *sakti*... But I tell you, if a *lontar* is really *sakti*, then it won’t fade. It doesn’t need to be copied out like that. It’s not necessary. No. It’s not like that. Only if the Gods damage them will the *lontar* fall apart. They can’t be eaten by termites. No. They can’t be eaten by termites. I proved that. I put one on top of a termite nest for two days and two nights. It wasn’t even chewed a little bit. In fact the termites avoided it. It was clean and there were no termites around it. I tried leaving one out in the yard in the sun. There were lots of chickens. They were scratching the dirt and it said, ‘Go away, go away, go away’. It told the chickens to go away. The *lontar* was speaking. That means that the *aksara* can speak. They are alive. So I was misusing it, putting it any old place when I should have put it on a clean mat. ... Straight away I went, oh, this *lontar* can speak. Then I put a code on it (Sedana 30-12-06).
Lontar laid out to be blessed on Hari Saraswati, when homage is paid to Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, music and creative arts

Lontar have also been subject to less deliberate tests. The lontar called Pustaka Raja is attributed to Kakek Tua at the time he was still known as Dalem Tohlangkir, the High Ruler of Bali. Pak De tells me that only one copy exists, and that copy contains an injunction that forbids the existence of a second copy in Bali.

Once Pak A. took it away, when he was the Head of the Hindu Dharma Association in Tabanan. Komang’s grandfather gave it to him. He took it to Pak B., the Chancellor of Udayana University78, he used to be in the Office of Religion before he became a lecturer at Udayana. The whole night his house was shaking, everything was a mess, his books and everything were all over the place. Finally he took it back to Batu Ngang at one thirty in the morning. He didn’t dare

78 The initials of those named have been changed.
keep it. He said the *Pustaka Raja* should be kept by the Nation, that even though it belonged to our Ancestor Kakek Tua when he was ruler, the Nation should have it to put in the museum or in the Office of Religion. Kakek gave it to them even though the *lontar* was this thick. Okay, take it then (Sedana 081007).

The *Pustaka Raja* is one of three vitally important and related *lontar*, all marked as being created at the same time by Kakek Tua and dated *Bad 1 tonggek 6 rah 79* (Sedana 081007). The second of these is the *Raja Peni Raja Niti*, which contains the *Tatan Kerajaan*, the first regulations for rulers or kings of which there are many copies in circulation. The third is called *Aji Pingit* and contains restricted knowledge about the 127 Gods who descend to earth. It is said to cause blindness or even death if read by someone without the requisite *aji* to do so.

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79 The seventh day of the sixth month of *Bad 1*.  

*Leaves of an ancient lontar manuscript*
When the *Pustaka Raja* is brought out of storage it looks as ancient as Pak De claims. Although it appears dirty, dusty, and somewhat nibbled around the edges, when the *tali bima*, the string that binds it, is unwound and the *lontar* opened up, the characters themselves are revealed to be undamaged. This is because, as I explained earlier, it is the characters rather than the actual pages which are *sakti*. The pages are not immune to mice and insects, but the spirit of the characters, their *haura*, protects them from destruction.

Before reading, Pak De requests the permission of the *lontar*, speaking in the language of the Gods (*Bahasa Dewa*). Permission is granted, but Nyoman, because he can read some *aksara* but does not have the training in *aji* required to temper its potency, is warned not to look at the characters. It is fine for me to look at the characters, because my inability to read *aksara* at all means that there is no chance of my misreading it and thus rendering it dangerous. Pak De quickly finds the passage he wants, an event concerning Ancestors from Nyoman’s father’s family, and reads it to us. He tells us that this *lontar* is written in *Bahasa Dewani* (the language of the Gods in its earthly form) and *Bahasa Dewa Nagari* (the language of the Gods in transliteration), which to me appear as rows and rows of tiny and completely unintelligible characters engraved into both sides of each *lontar* leaf. Pak De first reads the text in its original language, and then translates it into Balinese for Nyoman, and at times into Indonesian for my benefit. It is a powerful story of a son leaving his life in the palace and going off to wage war across the seas in order to protect his homeland from invasion. In this instance, the story is told in order to provide a forgotten genealogical link within the lineage of Nyoman’s paternal Ancestors. During this rendition Pak De interrupted the story to explain something of the official process involved in interpreting these ancient texts in contemporary times.

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80 The *aksara* in *lontar* are ‘living’ characters imbued with spirit. Transliterations, photocopies and photographs of *aksara* are not ‘living’ and are therefore benign, thus Pak De had no problem with me including photographs of *aksara* in my thesis even though it may be read by people with knowledge of *aksara*. As discussed in Chapter 3, it is extremely dangerous to articulate certain powerful *aksara*. However, I was able to include a photograph of a transliteration of one such character because Pak De was confident that no one who saw it would be able to say it.
In the past at Tanah Lot in Beraban it was interpreted by seven Rsi Bhujana. Seven priests interpreted it. I read it out. It took three days and four nights to complete.

Anna – Did they write it down?

They wrote, typed, recorded, some of those who were writing down fell asleep, they got left behind and there would be gaps, because it couldn’t be repeated.

Anna – If you are reading it you can’t repeat anything?

And look how much it contains.

Anna – It doesn’t matter if it gets dirty like this?

No, you just do this. (Blows and flicks dust off it). Look how old it is. ... I was relaxed when I read it then, but I cleaned it before I took it there. Then everyone who was there said, Oh, I don’t dare to read it. I said, If you don’t dare then I will read it. It is mine after all. I will read it. There used to be a Pedanda Kerta (Brahmana Priest) in Tabanan, he was the one who swore people in at the Tabanan District Court. He could read it, but he could only read ten sheets before he said, I don’t dare go on. My chest is making a noise.

Anna – Where did he learn that language?

He said Kakek had taught him. He was one of Kakek’s students. Ya, Kak taught me. But only ten sheets, then you read the rest because it is yours. You own it and you created it. The one who owns and created it, he said.

Anna – Are there still students of Kumpi’s who can read it?

About forty people can read it.

Anna - Are they all in the Parisada (Hindu Dharma Association)?

No, they are like me.

Anna – Balian?
Yes, balian or pemangku (temple priests), because they don’t want to be involved in worldly matters. The problem is I was forced. If I hadn’t been forced I enjoyed being involved in worldly matters, accumulating wealth, I liked that. But I was forced and eventually I couldn’t seek wealth (Sedana 081007).

Pekak, Pak De’s father, inscribing lontar
One hundred thousand characters

It is evident from the explanation above that even those who have acquired sufficient linguistic skills to read the lontar and undergone extensive training in lontar based knowledges (as the priest referred to above must have), may nevertheless remain ill-prepared to read lontar known to be sakti. This is because unless they have studied the Catus Pata Mono Sewu, the hundred thousand characters that reside within the human body, they will be unprepared to mediate the power of the characters in the text. Pak De made this very clear in his discussion of the historical texts known as Purana Tattwa, which relate to specific temples and are restricted to the descent groups associated with them:

If they were made from bronze, then according to Kakek it was so they wouldn’t decay, because the Purana texts can’t be made again and again. If they were made again and again then they would contain different perceptions. Whoever made them would take credit. That is what our Ancestors were afraid of, that whoever copied out the characters would say that they owned them, that they were the descendants. That is why in the lontar it says, pingit akena juga, arang wong weruha. Why was it restricted, and only one or two people knew it? Because our Ancestors were worried about what would happen if lots of people knew it. The word wera means don’t give it to those who don’t need it. It doesn’t mean the lontar can’t be studied. No. There are texts, including the Kundalini, that say, yan tan ana tigang dasa lima nahun ayua kawedar muah katemah kita den nira kang aji iki. That is in their language. In human language it says, before 35 years have passed, don’t read this again, and don’t ask someone else to read this again so that it doesn’t destroy your life and you don’t suffer misfortune reading it. Most people don’t really understand the characters of that tattwa, because those characters reside within the human body itself. ...

Our Ancestors said it was wera, meaning don’t speak about it in places where it doesn’t need to be spoken about. It doesn’t mean the lontar cannot be read. It can be read but there are conditions concerning who reads it. If the lontar contains ancient aksara, it should be read by someone whose aji (knowledge/power) is advanced. Just like the Lontar Babad Kundalini, and the Pustaka Raja, and the Makuta Tattwa, and the Kanda Makuta Tattwa, they have to be read by someone...
with advanced *aji*, meaning someone who knows that within the human body are what is called *Catus Pata Mono Sewu*, one hundred thousand characters that have to be activated before reading that ancestral text. They have to be activated. Before someone has activated all those characters, they *shouldn’t* read this *lontar*. That is what it means. Don’t read this *aksara* before all of your characters have been activated.

*Lah ta abukiakena kitang kita kang kara ning aksara nia rumuhun, apan yan tan jati jati kita weruh mawisesa, kasor ikang aksara kita, apan iki utama ning utama dahat.*

That means, this ancestral text is dangerous because you do not yet understand what is inside your own body in order to be able to follow it. That is what *wera* really means. If it is *wera* and we talk about it in a place where people are drinking, are drunk, then people can get emotional, they can lose control, and we end up fighting with them. Instead of intervening, we end up fighting. That is one example. That is why our Ancestors said, anyone who reads *aksara*, who reads this writing, has to put their thoughts into the writing first. Their thoughts can’t be all over the place, because the writing is old writing, ancient *aksara*. We have to really think about that ancient literature with our whole spirit or our whole self. Within those characters are the characters called *Aksara Catus Pata Mono Sewu*, one hundred thousand characters within the human body, it contains all of those characters. We need to unite those characters within our own spirits in order to follow that *aksara*, that literature (Sedana 021107).
Pak De demonstrates his intimacy with the *lontar* by putting one in his pocket

Mastering the characters of the human body is a major step towards the kind of self-guidance which Pak De, as a teacher of Balinese knowledge traditions, holds up as one of the first stages towards gaining knowledge and wisdom. Unguided access to *lontar* which are *sakti* is inadvisable for those who are not adequately prepared, and few people are willing to undergo the degree of study that makes access to these texts safe. Even those who undertake advanced studies in *aksara* are bound by the rules and requirements that govern access to particular *lontar*, as the story which followed Pak De’s explanation of the three key *lontar* demonstrates.

These three *lontar* cannot be separated. This one is called *Raja Peni* and *Raja Niti*. This is *Aji Pingit* (Restricted Knowledge), about the Gods who created the order of humans and the order of Gods (*Tatanan Manusia* and *Tatanan Dewa*). These three cannot be separated, they must be as one. This *pusaka* (collection of ancestral texts) is called *Tri Tata Karma Dewata*. If someone doesn’t know the
characters called *Catus Pata Mono Sewu*, one hundred thousand characters within their own body, then they shouldn’t read it. That’s what it means. I know them so I dare to read it but I have to turn it around first five times, seven times, eleven times. If there is no flare of fire here, then it means it is friendly towards me, so I can read it. If there is then it means *lehnia abukti*, which means I have to stop these characters first. They will move - *drrrr* - like they did with Kakek, Nyoman’s grandfather, my father. He thought he was really clever, he knew the characters, all types of characters, only he didn’t know *Bahasa Dewani* (the language of the Gods in its earthly form). He knew *Bahasa Dewi Nagari* (the language of the Gods in transliteration), so there were characters that he knew. These characters were moving, *tet...tet... ha na ca ra ka*81, they kept moving *ha na ca ra ka trettitt*, he stopped them. He stopped them moving and looked at them but he had only read one line when *plett*, all the characters vanished. He thought the *lontar* didn’t contain any characters but it was his eyes that couldn’t see anything.

I was at the farm with Kakek. There used to be lots of sugar cane there. I had a little hoe with me. De82, De, *aduh*! said Kakek. Your father is blind. In the middle of the peanut field he knew that his child at Batu Ngang was blind. Your father is blind, let’s go home. He knew at the farm even though we were working hard there, working on the sugar cane with Kakek beside me. *Aduh!* He let one hand go. Stop De, let’s go home, your father is blind. *Aduh!* I was crying as soon as I heard my father was blind. Why are you crying? Kakek said. I was still crying. Let’s go home. He took me across the top of the rice fields. People were cleaning the rice fields. People were cleaning the rice fields. But he travelled there, alongside people *mejukut*, as the Balinese say, cleaning up their fields, and there was Kakek travelling above their hats. Kek, what’s up? I’m going home, there’s a problem, he said. He kept going, *sett*, even the buffalos were like this (looking up), until we reached home. We travelled above the trees then descended in the yard of our home. Descend, stamp your feet on the ground, Kakek said, and I descended. I started crying again. Why

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81 The first *aksara* of the Balinese alphabet.
82 Diminutive of Made.
are you crying? He said. I wiped my eyes again, even though they were wet from seeing my father.

A ceremony had been held in the dulang, a full ceremony for reading this lontar. So Bapak was blind. Kakek said, *eee* I told you it was too difficult, don’t read it. If you need to know, ask your son to read it. I was only 14, Kadek’s age. I was crying. What are you crying for? Can you swap eyes with him? No, Kek. If not then why are you crying? If you can treat him, then treat him so he can see. Oh Kakek, why are you so angry. I am not angry with you, I am angry with your father, and you are crying, you should be laughing. How could I laugh? His eyes were dripping like saliva from crying. I’m sorry, Bapak, I am too emotional, he said. You are old and have lots of children and still you are emotional. Which lontar did you take down? I already told you.

That is why I if I go away anywhere I have to take these three with me, wrapped in a pillow case, and I put them on a pillow above my head when I sleep, because I am scared someone else will read them. Even though they are fine like this, it’s fine if I put them here (on my lap), because they are friendly. When they are not friendly then they don’t want me to.

When Bapak was blind he said, De, if I die take care of your siblings. I don’t expect to live, I am blind. Even if I live I will be a problem for lots of people. It is better that I just go home, and then I can be reincarnated again. Kakek heard him and said, What are you saying? It’s easy to die. You have made all these children and now you are not going to look after them. That was the first time I knew Kakek had a temper. Ever since I was a tiny baby I had never seen Kakek angry. I had often seen Bapak angry, but never Kakek. That was the only time. What are you saying? If you are cleverer than me then I will leave you on this earth and then you will be really clever, Kakek said. But he said it louder than that. I am not talking the way he was talking. He was so loud the neighbours didn’t dare to look. They were frightened because what Kakek said was true. If Kakek was angry then anyone who looked might have an accident, the neighbours said. They

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83 *Dulang* is a wooden base used for offerings.
heard him but they didn’t dare look. Imagine how Bapak felt, as though his eyeballs were on fire, I think. I was silent but if I wiped my eyes, Kak said, Are you crying? No. I wasn’t allowed to cry.

I will tell you what happened, so you know, Anna. (Kakek said) Walk to the west now, to what is called the Batu Rancan there, past the Gangga River, the Balinese call it Tukad Yeh Gangga, then crawl up that steep riverbank, then after you go down that steep bank go past the River Gangga at Keputungan. Then you know where there are lots of furrows (parit), when there are 11 furrows then go into the cave and samadhi (fast and meditate) there for 30 days and 30 nights. Your sight will return, Kakek said. Yes, father. He went straight away and put on a red sarong, the kurma sarong he used to wear. He left. He was wearing a long sleeved shirt, like the jackets they used to wear with pockets here and here. De, I am going now. If I die, remember your siblings, he said. I can’t leave anything for my children, I hand over the family to you, please guide them well. I was crying. You cry at this? Kakek said. Bapak’s eyes were red as fire, red and stinging. Then Kakek said, I am going back to the farm, are you coming, De? No. Kakek left. He travelled above the rice fields, above the trees straight to the farm. I watched him until he disappeared., You can see the farm from the west of the house. From there you can see the farm and the peanut fields on the farm. Once he descended there I went running along the edge of the sea looking for Bapak. He was crawling up the river bank, it’s called Enjung Keputung. I wanted to help him get up by taking his arm if there were slippery spots. I was getting close and all of a sudden Kakek was above a tree, a thorny Delendeng tree. What are you doing here? he said. I feel sorry for Bapak. Why are you feeling sorry for him? You’re the only one who does. Go home. No, Kek. Okay, then stay there, I am going home. He disappeared back to the sugar cane. I stayed to watch over my father because he was blind.

Kakek wouldn’t allow anyone to go, so that he would walk alone. Aduhhhh! I felt unbelievably sorry to see him suffering like that. I wanted to hold onto him. Why are you holding him? There Kakek was standing by the river. Why are you holding your father? Let him fall and roll. Aduhh! Then he left. Do you want to
go with him? I do, Kek. Then let him walk by himself, don’t hold him, let him walk. He was so unsteady on the road, it was four kilometres and he had to walk. Even I, who was a healthy fourteen year old, was tired by the time we reached the river. The river was deep but I could swim so it wasn’t a problem, and Bapak could also swim. Don’t swim here - setttt - Kakek took my hand. Oh, I closed my eyes so I wouldn’t see Bapak swimming. Why are you closing your eyes? Watch him so you know how he feels. He went straight up.

De. Yes. I am going home now. He left him there. He felt his way along, whether he knew by feeling his way or because his nabati\textsuperscript{84} could see a little because his ilmu was so high. He made it to the cave, Kek, but what’s inside the cave? If there are snakes then he’ll be bitten by snakes. Why are you thinking about your father? What has he ever given you? Has he fed you? But that was because Kakek took me and raised me, so how could Bapak feed me? It was very strange. Then I was silent and I didn’t want to eat and then Kakek cried. Finally it was Kakek who was crying, not me. Eat, De, eat, it’s okay, I will take you to see your father soon. Then at nine at night we went there to see Bapak - setttt - above the sea. He went straight up.

*Pan rowet selegang nyen semedhi. Sing kanti, nah paling ngemet nyen dua minggu, seger ba nyen*, Kakek said. (Pray for his health and he’ll be better in two weeks at the most). Let’s go back, have something to eat, your father is fine there. Kakek cried until morning because I wouldn’t eat, I was just silent. I didn’t eat all night, since the afternoon, even though I was exhausted. I was just worrying about my father. Finally Kakek cried seeing I wouldn’t eat. And then I thought, Oh, Kakek can cry too.

You mustn’t not eat, you’ll damage your stomach. Eat. Your father is clever, he is provided for - meaning he had ‘pure food’ (*makanan murni*) inside his stomach, he could eat, even without eating. That pure food would protect his stomach. That’s what Kakek told me. Then in the morning I had something to eat at nine o’clock. Let’s go and see Bapak, Kek. Let’s go. He knew how stubborn I was so

\textsuperscript{84} Pak De explained that *nabati* is related to the soul and runs on the power of the soul (Sedana 121207).
he gave in. Even though he said we shouldn’t visit him, we visited him. Ask your father. Pa, Pa, are you better, Pa? Yes. Don’t bother your Kakek, he won’t be able to treat his patients. There were no patients at home yet, I said. Let your Kakek treat people, don’t bother him. If he tells you to work on the farm don’t disobey him. He could still give me advice even in that terrible state. Do what Kakek tells you, follow his advice. Who else can guide you? No one can. I can only ask you to acknowledge these words. Kakek is the one who can educate and raise you, I can’t raise a child born as you were, Bapak said. It’s okay. I felt sorry for him and wanted to cry. Don’t cry, Kakek said, you mustn’t cry. It was his own fault, no one must cry.

Even though Kakek didn’t treat him, he came out after 21 days, even though Kakek had said 30 days and 30 nights. 21 Days. Open your eyes. He opened them. Oh, everything is red, Pak. Close them. Open them again. He opened them again. Oh, the world is like this. Close them. Open them. Oh, it’s Made. I can see him in front of me. Can you, Pa? Can you see? What can’t you see? I can see everything. Get up and walk. He walked. Okay, leave him. I left him there and travelled over the sea with Kakek. I saw him walking. Don’t look down at the sea or you’ll fall. How can I fall, I know you are holding me. Leave him. Your father is old, he knows the way. He will go whichever way he thinks is easiest (Sedana 081007).

This story is not tattwa, but neither is it hearsay. It is satua, a contemporary story. Pak De was relating his own experiences in order to demonstrate to me something about the potency of lontar, tattwa, aksara, as well as to bring me closer to his own experiences of coming to understand their potency. The lontar are not just texts and their contents are not just stories. The lontar are living entities imbued with the spirit (haura) of the aksara characters. The aksara are not just letters, words, phrases, sentences. They are living characters capable of speaking, acting, doing things. They imbue the lontar with a spiritual power that gives them agency. This power - inherent, latent, omnipresent - can be activated even without intent, as this chapter demonstrates. Traces of this power is carried by the tattwa narratives that derive from these lontar. Even if all we do is listen to these narratives, resonance between characters can occur, things can and do happen.
Chapter 5: Implications

Tanah Let was there from the beginning, it wasn’t just called Tanah Let since there was a temple there. Tanah Let, Desa Beraban, it is all Tanah Let. ... Tanah Let is land that is strong. Tanah Let is old land (Sedana 020309).

In this chapter I posit tattwa narratives as living narratives which establish and maintain relationships of intimacy and responsibility within particular localised regions. Through narratives pertaining to the local region of Tanah Lot, I examine how living narratives maintain currency in the face of the more dominant public histories in current circulation, as well as how they reinforce unique regional identities.

While tattwa narratives reference times, events, and characters of the ancient past, they maintain a contemporary relevance which sets them at odds with official accounts of the past. Public histories comprise information about people, places, and events, which can be presented to anyone by anyone. Even when the text or speaker is identified, the reader, the listener may remain anonymous. In contrast, tattwa narratives are transmitted in ways that implicate both speaker and listener/s. The relationships these narratives instigate and reproduce - between text and reader, between speaker and listener/s, between people and the elements of the world that take form within the narratives, between people and the knowledges conveyed through them - are as important as the content of the narratives themselves. Tattwa narratives bring elements of the world, past and present, known and unknown, seen and unseen, right up against each other, binding them together, or as Pak De put it, making them erat.

The official history of people, places and events in Bali, the stuff of history and guide books, of tourist brochures and websites; the versions of the past taught in schools, and regularly repeated in both written and oral forms, do not always accord with the stories passed down within particular families and communities.

These more public accounts of particular regions in Bali are not always acknowledged by the people who come from those regions. As might be expected, official histories, particularly those produced for consumption by non-Balinese audiences (whether Indonesian or foreign),

tend to either omit any elements which seem mythological or magical or, if they do contain mythology, they are presented as ‘local legend’. However, it is precisely the so called mythological, fantastical, legend-making aspects of these histories that both account for and reproduce implicated, bound, relationships between people and place. That is, these narratives of the past are transmitted in ways which implicate people in place and implicate people in relationships in the present.

As part of a Balinese family, my exposure to local narratives is itself enmeshed in the very processes of narrative transmission that I am identifying here. Rather than being merely an example of a personally relevant tattwa narrative, the following account of Tanah Lot is a specific kinship bound, localised, emplaced narration. The stories passed down through families and within communities bind people to significant Ancestors, places and events. For my own family, the region of Tanah Lot, Beraban holds great significance. It was the stories I heard about this region that alerted me to the discrepancies between local and public accounts. At the same time, hearing these stories, and being implicated by the context of their narration as well as by their effects, led me to consider just how critical such stories - which I came to understand as tattwa - are to asserting and maintaining local identities in contemporary lifeworlds.

In Bali, when a couple marry, the woman generally becomes part of her husband’s banjar. Our banjar is located within a village known as Desa Pandak Gede, which is a few kilometres from Nyoman’s maternal grandparents (and Pak De’s) banjar in a village called Desa Beraban where Tanah Lot temple is also located. In the years before Nyoman and I married I was told numerous stories about important temples and other sites in the Tanah Lot region. As the main source of these stories was my (then future) mother-in-law, it seemed only natural that most of the stories she told me related to her own birthplace rather than the region she had married into. In addition, while Nyoman’s mother’s banjar and his father’s banjar belong to different administrative villages (Desa Dinas), they belong to the same cultural region of Beraban, known as Desa Adat Beraban86. This means they share the same cultural laws and practices (adat) as well as alliances with many of the same temples, thus the people of our banjar and surrounding banjar are also familiar with stories relating to Tanah

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86 The official term for traditional village units was changed from Desa Adat to Desa Pakraman by Bali Provincial Regulation No.3 2001 (Haruya 2005) as part of the move towards greater regional autonomy throughout Indonesia, but people in our region still talk about Adat Beraban.
Lot. However, more recently, the stories Pak De told me about Tanah Lot revealed why our banjar is part of Adat Beraban, and thus why the more distant region of Beraban is of greater importance to our extended family than the lands where our banjar is situated.

Komang’s (paternal) Ancestors used to live at Tanah Lot, at Beraban, at the edge of the village of Beraban, to the north. But they were driven out by insects, so they moved to where they are now, to Pandak. They live there by the edge of that river, but they originated from Beraban. They were moved by the leader of Beraban, Tanah Lot, because Komang’s Ancestors couldn’t remain there. They were driven away by insects, they were like ants. So they asked their leader there, who was called the Bandesa Beraban, to give them land over there. Finally they left their land. The people at Pandak no longer looked after it so it was taken over by other people. That is why a lot of their story has been lost (Sedana 021007 my emphasis).

I was entranced by the stories of Tanah Lot right from the start, not least because my first contact with the black sands and rocky foreshores of that dramatic stretch of coastline and of Tanah Lot Temple itself was delayed for reasons both cultural and romantic. Local knowledge holds that unmarried couples who visit Tanah Lot Temple will quarrel and break up soon afterwards, thus Nyoman and I were forbidden from visiting the temple together before we married. Various people advised us of this, but no one explained the reason for the prohibition. Thus it was mysterious and exciting when, on the day before Nyepi, the Balinese day of silence which falls every 420 days, and two days before our wedding day, I sat on Nyoman’s maternal grandparents’ front porch not ten minutes from Tanah Lot Temple and a coastline I had never yet set eyes on during seven years of extended visits to Bali, and watched as thousands of people paraded to the beach for the coastal melasti ceremony that precedes Nyepi.

Years later, when I asked Pak De about this custom of avoidance, this is what he told me:

Tanah Lot used to be ruled by the King of Mengwi, Raja Mengwi. One day the King of Mengwi’s son visited Tanah Lot and he saw a beautiful girl there, but he didn’t know whether she was a Goddess or a human. She was actually the child of a Goddess, the Goddess at Tanah Lot. The prince wanted to marry her and
become a God at Pusa Beda in Tabanan. After they were married the girl was given a *padi* beetle in a box as a gift. She told her husband, don’t open the box, I am going to bathe. But her husband was so curious to see what was inside that he opened it. As soon as the box was opened the *padi* beetle flew out and he couldn’t catch it. After that, the girl went back home. Her name was Ayu Mas Silih Angin. She returned home because it meant that her husband was dishonest. She left him. He kept asking her to come back, and then he got angry. He was so angry that he went to war. He went to war against his parents-in-law. He attacked them. After he attacked, Ayu Pudah Harum, the mother of the girl at Tanah Lot, got angry. She took out a weapon and shot him, breaking both his legs. And then she said, if anyone comes here with a partner they are not yet married to, I will separate them. If anyone comes here who is more than seven months pregnant I will bring on their labour.

That’s why there are lots of people who go there who are heavily pregnant who give birth straight afterwards. That is the story from the past, she was so angry that she cursed everybody. That is why people from Tanah Lot, if they aren’t married yet, they won’t take someone there if they really want to marry them. If they are just friends then it doesn’t matter. That is what happened at Tanah Lot back then. That is why people there say, don’t take her there or this will happen, because it has happened so often before.

That is written in the *Babad Kundalini*, that history. That is the story from the past, of the marriage between a human and a Goddess, the son of Raja Mengwi. He was blessed by the Gods to become the God of Pusa, which was called Pusa Beda. That was the story. He was considered to be a descendant of Wisnu, a human descendant of Wisnu, and he was blessed by the Gods because he married a Goddess.

Now the Goddess of Tanah Lot is separated from the God at Beda, separated by a small river called Air Bumbung that runs beside Bapa Temple. The God of Beda will only ever be able to rejoin the Goddess of Tanah Lot when the branches from the west side of the river unite with the branches from the east side of the river. They are still separated to this day because the branches can’t connect. If they
meet up they separate again. Even though the river is small, the branches can’t cross over from the east to the west. It was used as a border by that mother at Tanah Lot. To this day the God at Pusa Beda comes down and possesses people. Sometimes people are temporarily paralysed, they can’t move, they can’t get up, because he was struck by that weapon. They are struck by the curse and they can’t move. That is the story. That is why at Tabanan, at Tanah Lot, there are two padi beetles, those insects that eat the rice. There is one at Beda, and one at Tanah Lot. The one at Beda is an offshoot from the one at Tanah Lot. That is the story of the Goddess there. Now that God is restricted, he is not allowed to visit Tanah Lot. That is the story. Now, if someone is more than seven months pregnant, don’t take them there. If a couple have not had their wedding ceremony but they have agreed to marry, then they shouldn’t go there. If the Goddess sees them there they will break them up. There was a big battle because her daughter wasn’t respected by that man.

Even if a couple plan to marry the next day, if they dare go there first then they have to accept the disastrous consequences. That is what that Goddess did because she was so angry. Today’s generation who know that history have to tell their descendants so they don’t get into trouble. That is the story from the past. That is why people now say, don’t take your girlfriend there, or you will break up. But if you ask why, many people don’t know that story because they haven’t read it (Sedana 151007).

Tanah Lot is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Bali, as well as one of the most photographed, thus it could be expected that the history of Tanah Lot would be well documented. Busloads of tourists are escorted there daily to bear witness to the beauty of the temple, situated amongst the lush drapery of its rocky sometimes-island, and to capture dramatic images of its silhouette against spectacular coastal sunsets. Most of the guidebooks, tourist brochures and websites directing visitors to the temple inform us that it was created by a Hindu Priest from East Java called Dang Hyang Nirartha when he visited Bali sometime between the 15th and 16th century (dates vary widely). Some also mention that ‘according to legend’, Nirartha moved the rocky outcrop where the temple is located offshore, or that he
turned his belt into the black and white snakes whose descendants guard the temple to this
day.

Tanah lot temple, 2009

The following Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanah_Lot) entry for Tanah Lot is entirely
typical of public accounts of the temple’s history:

Tanah Lot means “Land in the Middle of the sea” in Balinese language. Located
in Tabanan, about 20 km from Denpasar, the temple sits on a large offshore rock
which has been shaped continuously over the years by the ocean tide.

Tanah Lot is claimed to be the work of the 15th century priest Nirartha. During
his travels along the south coast he saw the rock-island’s beautiful setting and
rested there. Some fishermen saw him, and bought him gifts. Nirartha then spent
the night on the little island. Later he spoke to the fishermen and told them to
build a shrine on the rock for he felt it to be a holy place to worship the Balinese sea Gods.

The Tanah Lot temple was built and has been a part of Balinese mythology for centuries. The temple is one of seven sea temples around the Balinese coast. Each of the sea temples were established within eyesight of the next to form a chain along the south-western coast.

At the base of the rocky island, poisonous sea snakes are believed to guard the temple from evil spirits and intruders. As well as one giant snake which also protects the temple, which was created from Nirartha’s scarf when he established the island.

Nirartha is associated with the Javanese Kingdom of Majapahit whose members fled to Bali to escape an increasingly Islamic East Java. According to the history books, once in Bali, Nirartha became the royal priest to the reigning Balinese King, Dalem Watu Renggong of Gelgel, the second king of Bali to be appointed by the Majapahit Kingdom. He is credited with spreading the religion of Hindu Dharma throughout Bali, reforming the Balinese political system, and establishing the caste system through which a ruling Brahmana caste was produced with himself as its spiritual leader.

While many published and online accounts I have come across fail to mention their sources, some refer to a *lontar* called *Usana Bali* which is attributed to Nirartha himself. However, most of the commonly cited information about Nirartha appears to come from two Brahmana texts entitled *Dwijendra Tattwa* and *Babad Brahmana*. In her study of the Balinese composition of the literary *lontar* called *kekawin*, Rubinstein (2000) provides considerable detail of those texts, drawn from multiple versions, which deal in varying detail with Nirartha’s biography, literary achievements, and the genealogical history of the Brahmana. She explains:

87 Wiener’s (1995) exploration of Balinese representations of the past amongst people to whom historical links to Majapahit were important, and Rubinstein’s (2000) discussion of the significance of links to Majapahit apparent in many Balinese written representations of the past, helped me to appreciate the significance of the work of scholars who have challenged the universality of Majapahit connections in Bali. For example, Nordholt (1986) examines the idea that Majapahit origins are a notion coined in response to the increasing Islamisation in Java and the spread of the idea that Bali was the heir to the lost Hindu realm of Bali. Reuter (2002) explores how Bali Aga communities refused to abandon their own local customs in favour of those associated with Majapahit.
Dwijendratattwa means ‘The (True) Story of Dwijendra’. Dwijendra is the ancestor of the Brahmana, a Javanese priest and poet possessed of extraordinary powers who migrated to Bali. The Dwijendratattwa refers to this priest by the names Dwijendra (Lord of the Twice Born), Nirartha (The Unworldly) and Pedanda Sakti Wahu Rawuh (The Newly-Arrived, Supernaturally Invulnerable Pedanda), as well as Twan Sumeru (Lord of [the sacred] Mount Meru) when he visits Lombok, and Pangeran Sangupati (Prince of the ‘Provisions for Death’) when he visits Sumbawa. It gives him the titles of dang hyang and mpu.’ (2000:72-73).

The Brahmana priests, or pedanda, are considered the foremost specialists of kekawin composition and Rubinstein’s primary interest in the above texts here is in what they reveal about Nirartha’s literary creativity and its links with the propensity of Brahmana pedanda to compose kekawin poetry. She states, ‘it is not my intention to examine the authenticity of the many claims made by the Brahmana in their texts. The texts record Brahmana truth and are authentic and relevant to them’ (2000:70). She also points out that ‘there exists no evidence that either supports or challenges the historicity of Nirartha’ (2000:73). The dates of the original texts are unknown and no original manuscript known of. However, Rubinstein notes that although ‘the authors and compilers of most versions’ of the above two texts ‘are not named, they would have been known to the Brahmana communities in which they lived at the time they wrote’, and that those manuscript copiers who did record their identity are pedanda (Brahmana priests) and Brahmana (2000:75). Given that Nirartha is the apical Ancestor of the Brahmana, the one who all Brahmana trace their descent to, it is understandable that these texts continue to be copied, transmitted and performed, and that the tattwa narratives of Nirartha maintain ongoing significance amongst the Brahmana in particular (2000:82).

However, problems arise when these texts are interpreted as evidence of Nirartha’s pre-eminent creative role and authority in regions such as in Tanah Lot where there were prior inhabitants with their own cultural practices and histories. Rubinstein (2000:112) translated the following story in order to demonstrate how Nirartha is portrayed as a Godlike being with great supernatural powers who travelled around the spiritually charged landscapes of Bali composing poetry and establishing temples (2000:91).

Finally he arrived in the realm of Tabanan.
There he came upon a promontory of immense beauty, whose perception lay beyond the realm of the senses. It harboured supernatural forces. The *pedanda* halted and sat down. He was seen by fishermen [...]. It will not be told how during the night many people appeared in his presence. The *pedanda* gave instruction about religious doctrines. In addition, he ordered the inhabitants to construct a temple there as a place to request good fortune from *bhatara suksma* (the Immaterial god). That is the true story from the distant past of why Pura Tanah Lot (Temple in the Land of the Sea), also known as Pura Pakendungan (Temple piled-high), exists now.

While stories like this one have come to prominence, their claims are actively resisted by locals of Tanah Lot who trace their descent to Ki Dukuh Sakti Jempungan and who continue to refer to and pass down *tattwa* narratives which attribute the establishment of Tanah Lot temple and other local temples to *their own* apical Ancestor at a time long before Nirartha ever set foot in Bali.

People say, Oh Dinartha\(^88\) created this, oh, Hyang Dinartha created that. But that is just politics. It is politics. The things that were created by Dinartha date back 700 years, only then were there things created by Hyang Dinartha. But in *bad 1, bad 2, bad 3, bad 4, bad 5*, Mpu Dinartha had not yet come from Majapahit, people had not yet fled from Majapahit, he had not yet created anything here (Sedana 100107).

Local *tattwa* narratives also record that Nirartha built a temple at Tanah Lot, but they tell a different story to most public accounts of the region, recounting that the first temple to be built at Tanah Lot was a five level temple called *Baruna Tattwam Prarasta Pancara* (*Baruna* is the God of the Sea) established by Kaki Tua in *Bad 3*. According to local *lontar*, when Dinartha was sent to Bali his divinely bestowed powers were recognised and he was given the title of Pedanda Sakti Bahu Rawu. Recognising the powerful forces around Tanah Lot, he sought permission from the local leaders of the region, who Pak De’s sources identify as Ki Kaki Dukuh Sakti (Kaki Tua), Ki Bandesa Beraban Sakti (the village head), and Ki Mangku Sakti (the village temple priest), to build a south facing shrine with three levels (*meru*

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88 According to Pak De’s sources Nirartha’s original name was Dinartha, although he changed his name after arriving in Bali and again after each of his five marriages.
tumpang tiga) in order that his Ancestors from Majapahit could be brought to Bali and thus his descendants be brought to Bali. These events were recorded (purportedly by Dinartha) in the Lontar Dwijendra Tattwa in the 16th century (saka year 1569). This lontar also includes knowledge derived from the local texts entitled Babad Kundalini, the lontar pertaining to the descent line of Kakek Tua, and Purana Tattwa, the lontar concerning the tattwa of Tanah Lot Temple. In turn, Nirartha’s presence in the region was noted in the lontar volume entitled Babad Kundalini Bad 6 in which events of that time were recorded.

While these local texts also attest to Dinartha holding ceremonies in Bali and spreading the Majapahit religion of Hindu Dharma, they attribute the introduction of the caste system to the ruler Dalam Waktu Tengong (also referred to as Dalam Waktu Genjong/Dalam Watu Renggong) (Sedana 2010, fieldnotes from unrecorded discussion).

The vagueness about the time of Nirartha’s visit to Bali and discrepancies between the various stories that refer to his activities during this period of time give some indication of the difficulty of producing the kind of evidence that definitive historical accounts demand. Moreover, as (most) lontar are known to be regularly copied and rewritten, one set of stories does not necessarily rule out the veracity of others. Likewise, temples in Bali are regularly renovated and rebuilt, and any evidence, whether textual or archaeological, that points to the establishment of a temple at Tanah Lot by Nirartha does not negate those sources that attest to prior temples and practices of worship at the site long before that time. Notably, public accounts of Nirartha’s deeds tell us little of the practices of the indigenous Balinese inhabitants of the region at the time of his visit.

It is salient to consider the political implications of the public histories of places and events in Bali, created and distributed as many of them originally were by the ruling elite of the Majapahit Kingdom as they established their authority and spread their own religious doctrine in Bali. The caste system introduced by Majapahit rulers was later reinforced and upheld by the Dutch colonisers for their own strategic and administrative reasons. This system had no place for the majority of Balinese people who were placed into the lowest caste category of sudra. The history of the kingdom of Majapahit and the heralding of connections to that kingdom by generations of (often powerful) descendants who trace their lineage to Majapahit rulers and priests has effectively overwritten and marginalised the rich
historical records, both oral and textual, of those Balinese who trace their lineage to pre-
Majapahit, non-Brahmana Ancestors (see Creese 2000, Pringle 2004).

There has been some recognition of this in the literature pertaining to the Balinese mountain
communities referred to as ‘Bali Aga’ (in particular see Reuter 2002), who are generally
considered to be the island’s only indigenous people. However, this perception means that
the ‘Bali Aga’ have come to be considered an aberration to the Balinese norm rather than just
one example of what may be many localised groups or clans who continue to uphold the pre-
Majapahit traditions of their Ancestors. Helen Creese (2000:17) notes that while there is a
great deal of evidence for pre-Majapahit Balinese history, it is generally ignored in Balinese
historiography. She attributes this to the fact that many of the texts referenced were collected
by Dutch scholars and thus represent 19\textsuperscript{th} century European interests rather than those of the
Balinese. However, she also states that ‘All groups that accepted the title of wong Majapahit,
that is all except the so-called Bali Aga, sought their origins in the fourteenth century world
of Majapahit, and all were complicit in replicating and formalising this version of Bali’s past’
(2000:30).

My discussions with Pak De indicate that it is not the case that all groups except the Bali Aga
have either accepted the title of wong Majapahit (Majapahit people) or have been complicit
in replicating the Majapahit version of Bali’s past. While they are not necessarily secret,
accounts of the pre-Majapahit past may have been maintained in less public arenas for good
reason. These accounts incorporate and transmit values and knowledges which were at odds
with those advocated by the Kingdom of Majapahit in their quest for ascendency, and later by
those promoted by the Dutch in their endeavours to gain control of the island. And as Creese
(2000:36) notes, in more recent times, the Indonesian nation state has downplayed regional
differences for the sake of establishing the type of ‘shared historical experiences’ considered
in the national interest.

It is not, I suggest, so much that these tattwa narratives were kept secret in the past. Rather, in
the past there was good reason not to assert them publicly when doing so might lead to
conflict with powerful ruling entities. In addition, there was no great need to assert them
publicly when they could still be maintained and transmitted perfectly well in the local arenas
where they matter most. However, there may now be more reasons for making these types of
regional narratives more public than they have been historically. The increasing accessibility
of various media forms, particularly the internet, means that anybody can write their own version of ‘local history’ and publish it or circulate it online. There are moves by the Central Government of Indonesia to institute a pan-Indonesian Hinduism, with greater references to Indian Hinduism than has been the case in the past, and not all Balinese are happy about this (see Ramstedt 2004). At the same time, there may be fewer reasons not to make these narratives public than there have been in the past. Indonesia is moving towards greater regional autonomy and administrative decentralisation, which includes restoring some of the functions of traditional Balinese Villages9. Perhaps it is a combination of these factors which has created both a greater need and a greater willingness to make public localised accounts of the past90. In listening to Pak De asserting local tattwa accounts of Tanah Lot over those accounts that reference Nirartha, not only to me and other family members, but in the context of discussions with other priests, both mangku (non-Brahmana priests) and pedanda (Brahmana priests), I have gained the impression that he, at least, intends to do so.

While Nirartha is widely recognised as an important historical figure, he is not recognised as an Ancestor by the locals of Beraban. Narratives and historical accounts that hold him responsible for sites of significance in the region, such as Tanah Lot Temple, are considered both erroneous and irrelevant to locals who trace their lineage back to Ki Dukuh Sakti Jempungan, more familiarly known as Kaki Tua. These people continue to pass down their own knowledge of these places along with the lontar on which this knowledge is based.

About those black and white snakes at Pura Tanah Lot. The temple’s creator was called Kaki Tua. He is my Ancestor. Yes, the creator of the temple is my Ancestor. After he achieved moksa, because humans couldn’t be trusted to guard the temples, he had to use his own powers to guard them. So he bought his belt to life in an earthen pot, and after one hundred and sixteen days the belt came alive again as a snake. That is why the snakes and their food are found in that area. Like the Robber Crab. The Robber Crab is food for the snakes, for the belt. Both good and bad are there because he made the snakes black and white, or left and right, so the world is in balance and the left and right sides are not in opposition (Sedana 171206).

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89 For a detailed discussion of the move to regional autonomy in Bali see Nordholt (2008).
So why then, does even much of the locally produced tourist information, such as the official Tanah Lot website managed by Beraban locals, reiterate the public stories of Nirartha’s creative endeavours in the region? Again, this is a political issue. Tanah Lot as a tourist venture is maintained by Desa Beraban as a whole, a region which Pak De informed me consists of 1860 Kepala Keluarga (household heads, generally fathers), only 81 of whom trace their descent directly back to Ki Dukuh Jempungan. It is this small group of descendant families who are primarily responsible for and committed to maintaining those local tattwa narratives which predate the arrival of the Kingdom of Majapahit and Nirartha and the stories pertaining to them. While other people in the Beraban region are aware of these narratives to varying degrees, they may be unauthorised and unprepared to publicly challenge official public accounts of the region without recourse to the textual sources on which those narratives are based, without access to the ‘evidence of what was the case’ that tattwa (including tattwa narratives) provide (see Hobart 1997, Wiener 1995).

Like Rubinstein (2000), I am not concerned here with testing the veracity of either the Brahmana or the local accounts pertaining to Tanah Lot. Rather, my concern is with the ways in which local knowledges of and from the past retain significance and authority despite, and perhaps in part because of, their disparity with more recent and better known accounts of the region’s past.

According to the regulations in the Tatanan Bali (the lontar which describes the system of leadership in Bali), Pedanda or Rsi or Mpu (priests from different clans or descent groups in Bali) made decisions about ceremonies and offerings, they didn’t make decisions about the leadership system, about the systems in Bali. In the past in Bali, it was only members of the kingdom and the rulers who studied Ilmu Kadigjayan, Ilmu Kesaktian, or Ilmu Kedyatmikan (different forms and levels of knowledge/power). Priests studied the Ilmu Kawikon (knowledge/power specific to priests).

Mpu were Arya, Rsi were Wesia. The situation of priests was politicised in Bali by Dalem Watu Renggong. Mpu Dinartha’s name was changed to Pedanda Sakti Wahu Rah, so Balinese who didn’t know him would think, oh he is a divinely

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91 For example see http://www.tanahlot.net/home/
92 Arya and Wesia refer to the names of Balinese (pre-caste) clan groups.
titled priest (Pedanda Sakti). If they called him Mpu Dinartha, then he would still have been considered less important than the Balinese Mpu. Even Mpu Dwijaksana who was the Mangku (non-Brahmana priest) at Besakih (the mother temple) said, I never trembled before Mpu Dinartha. He changed his title because his face was not known to the Balinese. He was from Majapahit, the fall of Majapahit, and only from that time were there Brahmana called Pedanda in Bali.

The Brahmana were all called Brahmana, Brahmana this, Brahmana Rsi, Brahmana that. If they were called Brahmin, Brahmana, they had a Dwijati ceremony. That meant they became a priest, whether it was a Rsi priest or an Mpu priest, or a priest from the Ida Bagus social group. Most Balinese were Rsi or Mpu. When Rsi Bujangga Wesia Woh Aji came over from Indochina, he spread religion in Bali in order to ensure that people’s beliefs were not at odds with each other or in conflict with each other. In the past in Bali there was Hindu Tirta and Hindu Siwa. That was all. The difference was that those like me who were from Tanah Let were called Hindu Tirta. Their dead were buried, not cremated. Those who cremated their dead were followers of Hindu Siwa. That was the difference.

Their beliefs were the same, their ceremonies were the same, the only difference was whether the dead were buried or cremated93 (Sedana 151008).

Pak De is here asserting a localised identity, not a pan-Balinese identity. In Beraban, as no doubt in many other regions throughout Bali, unique local ritual practices and beliefs continue to be upheld in part precisely because origins are vitally important to identity in Bali.

The words Ong sidhi, Ong awignam nama sidhi in Balinese aksara are introductory words, recited before reading certain lontar in order that the reader is not disturbed by the characters of that lontar.

That’s why we say Ong Sidhi, Ong awignam mastu nama sidhi. Nama sidhi, or nama sidham, or nama siwaya, they all mean the same thing. But those who are nama sidhi come from the ancestral descent line of Ki Narayana. Ki nama siwa

93 On another occasion Pak De explained that Hindu Tirta followers revered Wisnu whilst Hindu Siwa followers revered Siwa (171206).
are from the descent line of Hindu Siwa, *Nama siwaya* are from the descent line of *Hindu Dharma*. All three have the same intention but they are pronounced differently. When we say *Awignam nama sidhi*, we are referring to the descent line of the *Hindu Tirta* Religion, like Ki Narayana, descendants of the water people. So you are also a water person Anna, because of this descent line (Sedana 150107).

Bali Strait from Tanah Lot

Pak De is the person primarily accountable for inheriting and passing on the knowledge and teachings attributed to Ki Narayana, also known as Ki Dukuh Sakti Jempungan, and Kaki Tua, which are inscribed in specific volumes of *lontar*. This means he also holds responsibility for those *tattwa* narratives pertaining to the region of Tanah Lot where Kaki Tua came to settle. It is unlikely that there is anyone else alive who shares his level of knowledge of the region and its narratives of and from the past. Unlike most published sources of information about the region, taken from Brahmana texts or unquestioningly
replicated from other published sources, his own knowledge is drawn from a mixture of both written sources in the form of the ancient lontar passed down within his family, and oral sources, in the form of the teachings and stories passed down to him by his grandfather in particular. Consequently, he is perfectly confident taking issue with those public accounts, and scornful of their frequent inability to reference their sources or account for their assertions.

For example, the word tanah means land, and the word let, like the Indonesian word laut, means sea. Because the temple at Tanah Lot is situated on a coastal land mass that becomes an island during high tide, Tanah Lot is generally translated as meaning ‘land in the sea’ or variants thereof. However, Pak De, who always calls the region Tanah Let, gives a different explanation:

That temple is Pura Tanah Let (Tanah Let Temple), the original historical name was Pura Luhur Tanah Let (Tanah Let Ancestral Temple) because of the yellow earth that never disappears, east of the palinggih shrine, old earth, golden earth from the sea that never disappears, in the north eastern corner. It was called Pura Tanah Let. Its only now in the era of tourist objects that its name has been changed to Pura Tanah Lot. Perhaps lot is considered to be alot. Alot is also thought to mean old earth. The same with the temple with seven levels (meru tumpang pitu). You’ve been there haven’t you, Anna? There’s a temple on the west side, in the midst of all those gardens. The temple used to be called Pura Kendungan because it was built out of kendung wood, sacred kendung wood. It is the residence of Dewa Sad⁹⁴ and it was called Pura Kendungan, but now people have changed the name to Pura Pekendungan. It used to be called Kendungan… now Pekendungan. And Tanah Let is now called Tanah Lot (Sedana 171206).

Both Pura Tanah Lot and the nearby Pura Pekendungan are important temples to thousands of people, not just those from the surrounding villages and communities. However, I have come across several sources declaring that Pura Pekendungan (Pakendungan) is just another name for Pura Tanah Lot, such as this one referenced and translated by Rubinstein (2000:112).

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⁹⁴ Also referred to as Hyang Sadhana Tra – both names for Dewa Wisnu in his six headed manifestation.
That is the true story from the distant past of why Pura Tanah Lot (Temple in the Land of the Sea), also known as Pura Pakendungan (Temple piled-high), exists now.

Perhaps at some stage someone unfamiliar with the region misunderstood or miscopied a text that referred to the two temples, mistakenly equating one with the other, and this error has been repeated by other writers also unfamiliar with the region’s temples. Whatever the case, errors like these both undermine those who speak with undeserved authority and serve as fuel to the fire of those who resent the textual colonisation of (their own) historically significant sites. Even the rare public accounts that do refer to the role of locally revered Ancestors in establishing local temples lack the authority and efficacy of living tattwa narratives as this (unauthored and unsourced) article from the major Balinese newspaper, the *Bali Post* demonstrates:

During the rule of Dalem Ketut Ngulesir from the Gelgel Kingdom, he asked Ki Kaki Twa to build a place of worship (*parahyangan*) at the coast of the Let hills. After Ki Kaki Twa found the particular place concerned, he cleared the forests of the region, and found a flat rock like a mat, sheltered by a Kendung tree. It was decreed that those (Gods) with the title of Hyang Sadhana Tra would reside at that temple into the future, as guardians who would ensure the security and prosperity of the region (*Bali Post* 080306 my translation).

This exact story also appears in a (2006) text entitled *Mengenal Pura* (Knowing the Temples)) where it is credited to the *lontar* entitled *Kutara Kanda Dewa Purana Bangsul (Pura Luhur Pekendungan)* and which states that the temple was built in 1408 (*Saka* year 1330) (2006:141). When I asked Pak De for confirmation of this story he laughed and told me that while the *lontar* cited is another name for the *Purana Tattwa* for Pekendungan Temple, that *lontar* contains no such story, and in any case, Pekendungan Temple was established well before Dalam Ketut Ngulesir came to power.

Pak De also tells stories based on the *Purana Tattwa* for Pekendungan Temple, but these reveal a great deal about the temple and its significance that has either been overlooked, omitted, or more likely, unknown to the writers of regional and temple histories in current circulation.
At the time when Kakek Tua was cutting down trees and clearing the forests around Tanah Lot, there was a market place at Pekendungan. Now there is a seven level temple there. But before there was a temple there were trees there, *kendung* trees. Dewi Indrani, the wife of Hyang Mahadewa who resides at the peak of Batu Karu, came down to the market. It was the marketplace of the Gods. Dewi Indrani was very pregnant, and after going to the market she gave birth to twins. The boy was called Surya Mertha, the girl was called Ayu Pudah Harum, because she was golden yellow like a *pandan* flower. Because the children were born on earth, they were given by the Gods to Kakek Tua to raise as humans. When the children grew up, Ayu Pudah Harum asked, Kakek where is my father, where is my mother? Kakek said, Oh, I am your father. That is your mother. How can you be, you are so old? Yes I am old, but I can be young. And he became young, about 20 years older than the girl. Now I am young, see, your mother is young. He could be young, he could be old, he could be a tiny baby. But she didn’t believe him. If you don’t believe me your father is at (Mount) Batu Karu, his name is Hyang Mahadewa. Your father is a God. You were born human because when you were born you fell to earth, you were born on earth, not in that realm. Do you want to find your father and mother? Yes. Both of them wanted to find them. Come on, let’s go. Then they were there. As soon as he said let’s go they were there at Batu Karu. When they reached Batu Karu their mother and father, Dewi Indrani and Hyang Mahadewa said, why did you bring my children back here? Raise them there. They said they wanted to know their father and mother so I had to bring them here. Take them back there. Make them a place of worship on the earth so they can worship us from there.

So Kakek went back and cleared the forest, the *kendung* forest. He cut down the big tree and it was inhabited by a golden dragon. There is a *keris* with 11 bends called Keris Kendung Sakti because its handle comes from the sacred *kendung* tree. Kakek Tua made it. The dragon was drawn into the *keris*. The *keris* he used to fell it, *sreett*, it was drawn in, the soul of the dragon went into the *keris*, that’s why the *keris* is called Keris Naga Mertha (the dagger of the Dragon Mertha). The dragon vanished, disappeared. The dragon sprawled to the ground. The tree could be felled, which is why the *keris* is called Keris Kendung Sakti (Sacred
Kendung Dagger), Keris Naga Mertha. Because (the dragon) Naga Mertha was sucked into the keris, the black steel keris. Kakek Tua made the steel by hand.

If the keris comes upon an enemy it can grow longer. Just by flashing it you can kill an enemy dead. That’s what a keris like that can do, the Keris Naga Mertha. People in Beraban call it Keris Kendung Sakti, because of the Sacred kendung tree. They think it is sacred because it was made using the base of the kendung tree. No. It was the soul of the dragon, the power of the golden dragon that fought with Kakek Tua, trett, it came up against the keris and it drew out its soul, petttt, so the dragon sprawled on the ground. It was 300 meters long.

When the girl reached 23 years of age she wanted to become a Goddess. If you want to be a real Goddess then go and bertapa (fast and meditate) on that rock in the middle of the sea. After she had done her tapa, because she was the child of Gods, she became clever very quickly. She went to Kakek and said, Kakek Tua, I am clever now, test me. I can disappear or I can be visible to humans. These are my powers, these are my abilities. Am I ready to become a Goddess? So Kakek tested her. Try and chase me, and if you can chase me, if you can find me, then you are clever enough to become a Goddess. If not then you cannot become a Goddess. Then Kakek vanished into the earth, srrtttt, into Sapta Petala (the underworld). The girl who wanted to become panicked. Where could she go? Because the earth had closed over. But she was very clever. Kakeeeek... Kakeeeek... She called Kakek like that. Finally the earth opened up and she went down to Sapta Petala. She was so clever, using her brains to plead, Kakeeeek... Kakeeeek... that he opened up the earth. So she was made a Goddess there. She was made what is appropriate for Gods, a five level pagoda, and her brother was made a seven level pagoda. That is the story.

Kakek Tua was there even before the Gods were. The Gods came there later. That’s why Kakek Tua is famous at Tanah Lot. Kaki Tua is really our Ancestor. Only then was there a temple there. Most of the temples there were created by Kakek Tua. He created those temples. He decided this temple is for this one, this one for this one (Sedana 020309).
To the casual tourist in Bali, the ‘legends’ included in tourist brochures, guidebooks and websites provide information concerning what locals ‘believe’ about a place, a temple site, a notable land formation, an island, but they do not, and cannot bring a landscape to life in the way that the living narratives passed from one person to another do. Without the tattwa narratives, the landscape is just land, and we can do little more to it than embody it with our own experiences and enliven it with our own memories. By enlivening the landscape with bodies and beings and events outside of our own experience, tattwa narratives evoke intimacy between people and place, between past and present, between Ancestors and descendants, between Gods and humans. They draw the listener into the landscape and the landscape into the listener.

Batu Bolong Temple, Tanah Lot

The rocky promontory of Batu Bolong temple, with its gaping hole that lets the sea pass through, is no natural wonder, but the site where a suspicious husband blasted a hole through the rock while waging war against the family of the Goddess of Tanah Lot. The black snakes
that guard Tanah Lot temple are the living incarnation of the snake conjured from the belt of our Ancestor, Kaki Tua, himself. The *ladang* amidst the rice fields of Tanah Lot where Pak De grew up is not just an old plantation forest. It is the place where Kaki Tua settled and started a line of descent that carries down to the present day. It is the point of origin for the *lontar*, the *tattwa*, the knowledge and narratives that inhabit his descendants to this day.

That is the story of that *ladang* in the past. Now people call that farm eerie (*angker*) because it retains spiritual power (*sakti*). There is still the scent of unseen beings there... It must never leave the family. I maintain it because I remember that history. From there Kakek Tua saw the peak of Mount Batu Karu and saw the depths of the sea. I remember that past. Although I wish I could really remember the past so I would know exactly what it was like but it is closed to me. Thus I know that people have their limits.

Because you, Anna, have come into my family, I am telling you what is in that history, I am telling you from the beginning. I am telling you the family structure from the beginning so you will know. My intention is that all my descendants know, know the good and the bad.

I spent my childhood there, with your mother-in-law when she was little, when she was young. Even if we ate yams and corn we felt happy there. Even now when I go there I feel like my thoughts are unburdened.

I remember the stories of the past, like Kakek Tua, through the paths of the *ladang* and the rice fields, as though he is reminding his descendants to look after them well. I will try and look after them properly (Sedana 031007).

It would be easy enough, in recounting these *tattwa* narratives of the distant past, to edit out all the personally relevant, extra-textual narratives and references that came with them, in order to produce an independent flowing narrative (as I did in narrating a story at the start of Chapter 1). However such renditions would neither reflect how these *tattwa* narratives are told nor reveal what it is that they do. Pak De’s motive for passing on these *tattwa* narratives is made absolutely clear. He holds a responsibility towards the *tattwa* pertaining to his birthplace - to the landscape and everything within it, past, present and future, known and unknown, seen and unseen - that these narratives both create and maintain. These *tattwa* must
be passed down. And as they are passed down, through the act of their narration, they implicate and obligate others. As Pak De tells these ‘stories’ to me, I am drawn into them, they become mine too. - *Your great grandfather, Anna. Your Ancestor, Anna. You’ve been there, Anna.* - I am invited to share responsibility for these narratives and given a role in ensuring that they are passed on to future generations. The landscape is written into me, and I in turn am written into the landscape. The possibility of dispassionate assessment, objective analysis, is an impossibility. I am implicated.

Pekak shows a *lontar* to me and Wayan (my daughter, his great granddaughter), 2004
Conclusion: The language of trees

As I have explored, a basic tenet of Balinese knowledge systems is that of the correspondence between human beings and the world around us, between the small world of the human body and the great world we live in. Pak De accounts for this correspondence in terms of the aksara (characters) of the body and of the world being essentially the same. This allows for the possibility of resonance between elements of the small world and the large world, between words and the body, between the words of the body and the words of the world. This knowledge is tattwa, and is inscribed in ancient lontar.

The Screenplay explores how such resonances might take shape in a contemporary, third generation, Balinese/Australian life world. In this way, I am able to raise questions in the Screenplay that are critical to the greater aim of this combined thesis. To what extent are the material effects of culture transmissible beyond the geophysical and traditional boundaries (country, place, text) from which they derive? Chloe’s experiences appear to pre-empt her encounter with tattwa narratives, rather than result from them. Tattwa narratives are not ‘just stories’, as Chloe, the protagonist senses, and Nini, her grandmother asserts. Because the stories Nini tells are tattwa, they are capable of both producing and accounting for resonances of the type explored throughout this thesis. Tattwa narratives enliven relationships of intimacy between those who are party to their transmission and elements of the world around them. The stories Nini tells (which I identify as tattwa narratives) account for the very real experiences Chloe is having: it is tattwa which has taken effect, interrupting what is ‘normal’ in Chloe’s world.

In other words, despite acute displacement - cultural, geographic, generational, linguistic – Chloe finds herself subject to tattwa’s potent efficacies. It is tattwa narratives which provide her with cultural references with which to understand the world in new ways. For Chloe, these narratives are transformative, providing her with a framework for interpreting her experiences that renders the world she is struggling with ultimately safer, more manageable, and more meaning-full.
**Dete Tattwa**

In the Screenplay, I utilise trees as the worldly element through which resonance between the small world of Chloe’s body and the great world around her occurs. In order to explain why I chose trees to illustrate the efficacy of *tattwa* in the Screenplay, it is necessary to delve a little further into *tattwa*’s ‘broader connotations’ (Hobart 2009:10).

Throughout this Dissertation, I have focussed on narratives described as *tattwa* while making it clear that the Balinese concept of *tattwa* encompasses much more than these *lontar* based narratives. In order to make this point, Pak De frequently reiterated a *tattwa* narrative pertaining to the origins of the world itself: When Sang Hyang Widhi, or God, created the world, it was empty, so he created five Gods called the *Panca Loka Pala* and sent them down to earth to complete the job. Those five Gods made heat, cold, water, fire and energy, causing the waters of the earth to thicken. After that, 18 Gods called the *Maha Rsi* were sent to earth.

In the language of God it says, *lah ta mukti kara ning krama manusanta jagat sraya ning ulun, jata jati krama ning wang kang hurip, amanta hamori kang krama ning kang dewata ya, ya juga krama ning ulun kang apa tapoania ika, abukti kang para ning awak ta, dewa sinuhun mangruwa hyang guru, hyang dewa guru, amor kita para ning awak, ayua kita molahing angga.*

In human language it is like this, Anna. You 18 *Maha Rsi*, I send you down to the earth because the earth is empty. Fill it with *aksara*. Those *aksara* are life, so that the earth is alive. Without *aksara* the earth is dead, the earth cannot move without *aksara*, without life. If it is not alive the earth cannot move (Sedana 101007).

Pak De is adamant that *aksara* are life, and that it is *aksara* that brought the earth to life. In turn, this thesis examines how *aksara* continue to enliven bodies and the world via *tattwa*. In the Screenplay specifically, I explore the understanding that trees, as one of the life forces recognised within Balinese knowledge systems, are themselves *tattwa*, as are the relationships between trees and humans.
As Pak De narrates it, the tattwa pertaining to the creation of the earth, says that after the earth had been written, the Gods created a set of five guidelines for human behaviour, which are also called Panca Loka Pala. These guidelines are tattwa, and are known respectively as: Dete Tattwa (the tattwa of trees and the unseen beings that reside in them), Buta Tattwa (the tattwa of animals and the unseen beings which are equated with them), Manusia Tattwa (the tattwa of humans), Dewa Tattwa (the tattwa of the Gods), and Widhi Tattwa (the tattwa of God).

The life forces these tattwa refer to possess different energetic or spiritual capacities which are known as Pramana. These include: bayu (the energy to grow/move), sabda (the energy to make sound), and idep (the energy to think and reason). Humans are Tri Pramana, which means we possess all three of these energies; animals are Dwi Pramana and possess the two energies, bayu and sabda; and trees are Eka Pramana, possessing only the energy of bayu. Each of these life forces are interdependent.

Dete Tattwa are the trees, they are dependent on Buta Tattwa, the animals. A forest without animals will not be strong and enduring. If you have trees and animals and no people then there is no-one to look after them. If you have all these three but no gods, then there is no one to provide for them and they will not endure. The fifth is Widhi Tattwa. Without someone to protect the world and its contents, then it won’t be strong and enduring, because only Widhi is eternal (Sedana 251206).

In this context, tattwa refers, at once, to these five life forces, to the regulations and prohibitions that both determine and govern these life forces, and to the lontar in which knowledge about these life forces is inscribed. In addition, tattwa refers to the language of those life forces. Each life force has its own ‘voice’, including trees, which lack sabda, or the energy to make sound. To be more specific, Dete Tattwa refers to the life force that are trees, to the unseen beings who reside in trees, to the knowledge concerning dete passed down by the Gods, to the lontar in which it is inscribed, and to the language of dete itself.

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95 Pak De explained that panca means five, loka means the earth, the world, and pala means fruit, produce (281007).
In the Screenplay, I have taken this idea of ‘the language of trees’ and explored its resonant possibilities. Although lowest in the hierarchy of five life forces described by the Panca Loka Pala, trees are critically important to humans because they provide for us in myriad ways. But more than this, within the tattwa which posits the body and the world in direct correspondence, trees resonate in very particular ways with humans because, as Pak De explains it, the aksara for trees correspond with the aksara for thoughts.

It is all here. Kayu (tree) is kayun (thought). Trees are called kayun, and those thoughts that go in one direction within humans are trees, kayu, kayun. The thing that activates the organs of the human body and directs us are kayun. What people call Eka Permana share one spirit with humans - kayun - because one part of the human spirit, and of trees, is kayu or kayun or thought. Nah, thoughts are like trees. They branch here, they branch there, they branch out here, they branch out there. That is the part of the human body that is kayun, that is tree. ...

Eka Pramana means one spirit (jiwa). Trees have one spirit (nyawa), so trees are Eka Pramana. You can say Permana or Pramana. Permana means a living spirit. Pramana means imbued with spirit or inspirited. They are the same, Permana and Pramana. But Pramana goes further and says that the spirit of the tree is inspirited within the body. Do you understand the difference? Pramana is when you are inspirited with the spirit of trees. Permana is the trees’ spirit. Both are correct, but if you, Anna, are inspirited with the spirit of trees, for example, if you know the language of trees, it is called Pramana. Pramana means we are united with the spirit of trees (Sedana 061107).
This complex passage was very difficult for me to translate and required a great deal of fine tuning and further consultation. The distinction between *Pramana* and *Permana* is not one usually drawn and the two words sound almost identical. But this differentiation is significant to the ideas I develop in this thesis, particular within the Screenplay. What Chloe experiences as a growing sense of resonance between herself and trees is *Pramana*. Over the course of the Screenplay, she appears to become literally inspirted with the spirit of trees. The trees ‘speak’ to Chloe, and Chloe ‘hears’ the trees, because there is resonance between their *aksara*. What Chloe lacks is the ‘language of trees’ with which to interpret this interaction. That is, she lacks cultural references for her experiences.

*Dete Tattwa*, the *tattwa* of trees, on one level incorporates instructions concerning how we, as human beings, should look after the earth. However, it holds deeper messages concerning how we should inhabit, and care for both the world and ourselves.

A forest at a height of one thousand feet to three thousand feet should have at least three hundred large trees and three thousand small trees. If that is reduced, then the trees’ roots will weaken and landslides will occur. That is why the Balinese say, cut down the trees and the mountain will fall (*rempak kayu rubuh gunung*). Because humans wipe out so many trees, the mountains erode, even though that edict has been there since the past. Because the trees are continuously cut down, their roots become rotten. Even if they regrow, the smaller roots don’t regrow. They are not as strong.

A – Clearly that is related to the characters. How do we look after the earth through the characters?

Through our own hearts, and through our own feelings. Why do we feel so sad to see that happening to this earth? Even though it was already decreed in the past, the number of trees were calculated, how many could be used, how many could be sold, why do we have to go beyond those amounts that were set out in

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96 Other people I asked weren’t aware of the distinction between *Pramana* and *Permana* and the dictionaries I consulted only glossed the word *Pramana*, (for example, *Panitia Penyusun Kamus* (1979), Echols & Shadily (1989), Sutjaja (2004, 2006), Anandakusuma (1986), *Tim Penyusun Kamus* (1993)).

97 Wikan (1990) asserts that Balinese do not separate thought from feeling, and uses the term feeling/thought to gloss the Balinese word *keneh*. 
the past? ... If a tree grows for one hundred years, it still can’t hold the earth. Even if a tree is there for a thousand years it still can’t penetrate the earth. Those were the words of the Gods.

A – Is that a metaphor for human thought?

Yes. However far human thoughts go, observe and follow them, cultivate them.

A – Because trees and thoughts are the same.

Yes. They are the same. The thoughts, the trees in this world are grown by humans and destroyed by humans. That is what the Gods said. Tata kita kara ning krama ruh kang jagat krama ning awak, ruh jagat sryania. When humans forget themselves, and forget to guide themselves, then the earth will be destroyed. It will be destroyed by humans themselves (Sedana 120108).

It is precisely these ideas that I am thinking through in the Screenplay. Dete Tattwa tells us that without thoughtful, ‘tree-ful’ ways of thinking, of cultivating thoughts and feelings, and of living in the world, humans ‘forget’ how to look after both the world and ourselves. We lose sight of who we are and of our relationships with other people and other elements of the earth.

This thesis presents narratives which are identified as tattwa. Tattwa narratives not only tell us things, they do things. It is not the content or the meaning of tattwa that is the real focus of this thesis. Rather, my concern is with how the efficacy of tattwa narratives takes shape, is maintained, and is reproduced in the present. In particular, this thesis is intent to illustrate how tattwa narratives bring various elements of the world right up against each other - past and present, unseen and seen, gods and humans - and produce resonances between them.

In researching and writing this thesis, I have not always kept with classical anthropological expectations. I have been inspired to write an experimental ethnography by the growing numbers of anthropologists who utilise multivocal, narrative, and fictocritical techniques (for example Behar 1996; Tedlock 2002, 1995; Stewart 2007, 1996, Abu-Lhughod 1993; Stoller 1997 to name a few). In breaking with convention, I intend this thesis to stand as a contribution to this growing field of experimental ethnographies which allow the ethnographer to utilise storytelling as a means of telling the stories of others. What
distinguishes my work from other experimental ethnographies is the inclusion of a fictional Screenplay. While the Screenplay cannot stand as a work of ethnography on its own, it is based on the same ethnographic research that informs the Dissertation, and explores the same central themes. In presenting the Screenplay and the Dissertation within the format of a single thesis, it is my aim that the two works are able to resonate with each other and inform each other in unique ways.

Rather than subject the stories I have been told to externally derived analytical frameworks, I experiment with combining and juxtaposing forms of writing and of story telling. By using creative and experimental styles of writing, by layering different types of narratives, by including other voices, I seek a way of writing about Balinese stories – and telling stories myself - which grants them the credence they are afforded in everyday life in Bali, and which imparts a sense of their cultural efficacy. In other words, this thesis constitutes a creative means by which to say something new about the experiential impact of Balinese stories.

In presenting the accounts and interpretations of one authorised narrator in the Dissertation, I do not mean to suggest that Pak De’s interpretations are either singular or exhaustive. Rather, I aim to demonstrate the authority that narrators like Pak De have in transmitting and accounting for Balinese knowledges and narratives within the context of kin-based networks. The decision to focus my research on Pak De was made for a number of reasons: Firstly, members of my immediate and extended family made it clear to me that Pak De was the appropriate authorised person to speak to me about the stories I was interested in. Secondly, it eventuated that Pak De’s role as caretaker of lontar in which these stories are inscribed meant that he held the means and authority to draw on textual sources during our discussions. Thirdly, once I started researching these stories it became clear that many of the stories passed down within families are different than those which circulate more widely and more publicly inside and outside of Bali. That is, the specificity of certain stories means that kin-based narration is a crucial element of their reproduction. It is precisely because Pak De considers me as one of his children, that he was prepared to tell me particular stories and teach me about the nature of those stories. His role as a teacher of Balinese knowledges, to Balinese and non-Balinese students, meant that he had a great deal of experience in translating between the textual languages of the stories, into Indonesian, which is the language we best share in common.
Behar (1996:6) insists that in the writing of ethnography ‘What happens within the observer must be made known’ if the nature of what has been observed by the anthropologist is to be understood by others. She makes the seemingly simple point that the anthropologist cannot observe what would or might have happened in their absence. The only thing the anthropologist really can know is what has occurred in their presence and by implication because of their presence. The real task of the ethnographer from her perspective is to make the otherwise unknown or unseen participatory presence of the anthropologist – known in ways which can inform the greater anthropological task of knowing others.

As I make clear, the kinship relationships within which these stories were told implicate and obligate me, their recipient, in particular ways. This does not, however, reduce my ethnography to a work of autobiography. Behar (1996:13) stresses that it is only interesting – useful - to assert one’s own autobiographical details into one’s writing if you can draw deeper connections between those experiences and the subjects under study. In the case of this thesis, autobiographical elements have been included not to demonstrate my own personal relations within one family but to exemplify how these have led to particular analytical and interpretative insights about the reproduction of culturally-based knowledge. Localised stories circulate in Bali amongst members of kin and community which not only produce specific effects but reinforce unique relationships of responsibility and obligation.

Unwilling to replicate the types of dry, authoritative anthropological texts produced in the past, contemporary ethnographers often seek to collaborate further with their informants by returning to the field once they have written up their work. It was during such a trip, in which I returned to Bali before submitting my thesis to consult with Pak De about what I had done with the stories and knowledge he had shared with me, that I came to understand perhaps the most crucial aspect of the transmission of tattwa narratives. Tattwa narratives engender relationships of intimacy - between those who speak and those who listen; between those who know and those who are learning; between those who listen and the specific cultural life worlds the stories present.
In the Screenplay, it is these intimate and implicating aspects of *tattwa* narratives which I emphasise. By exploring the impact of *tattwa* narratives on someone who is neither quite ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’ the cultural world from which they derive, I demonstrate the potent inclusive cultural effects these stories possess. These stories have efficacy even when they are experienced outside of the world they come from, even for someone who has grown up outside of that world.

This thesis argues that *tattwa* narratives are a vital part of Balinese life worlds, binding people, place, and experiences together in complex and compelling ways. They have played a crucial role in my own immersion into the cultural world of Bali and continue to do so, and provide a means through which the unfamiliar can be made accessible and inviting. These experiential aspects of *tattwa* are not easy to represent. A simple presentation of *tattwa* narratives alone would not bring out the their efficacious and enlivening capacities. Nor would any amount of transcribing or translating itself impart a full sense of the degree to which day to day experience is caught up in *tattwa* and its effects. Neither could more formal analyses of ancient *lontar* texts, no matter how detailed, reveal the importance of the lived effects these stories have as they are brought to life by story telling in the present. This thesis argues that it is not the possession or preservation of *lontar* texts which determines the transmission of locally important *tattwa* narratives across generations. *Tattwa* knowledge and stories are not trapped within the boards of *lontar*, even if they may be stored within them. Likewise, the inability to read the *aksara* in which *tattwa* is inscribed does not preclude people from experiencing *tattwa’s* effects, or even from transmitting these effects to others. In researching these stories, I have found that the transmission of localised *tattwa* narratives is dependent on these stories being passed on in oral form within families and communities in specific ways with specific effects. This thesis shows that this is not a role that can be taken over by the state or its institutions, by enshrining *lontar* in specialist libraries and preserving them in museums where they can only be consulted by ‘experts’. The preservation of *lontar* texts alone does not ensure that their contents are or can be transmitted appropriately and effectively.

*Tattwa* narratives must continue to be told orally if they are to enact, enliven, be efficacious. Their crucial role in both guiding and disturbing contemporary Balinese life worlds is dependent upon their everyday manifestation in stories, experiences and relationships. If, as I
argue in this thesis, tattwa narratives play a significant role in forging relationships of intimacy between the past, present and future, between people and places, between people and unseen beings and unknown realms, then their transmission is a task that depends on ways of ‘telling’ that are capable of generating resonance between elements of the world that these narratives refer to. It requires that narratives be told and retold in specific ways as this thesis explores.

To this end, I have used stories that are satua as means of positioning tattwa narratives in both this Dissertation and the Screenplay. This juxtaposition of tattwa narratives with stories which are satua reflects how they were recounted to me (as I discussed in Chapter 2.) Unlike tattwa narratives, satua are not strictly based on lontar texts or knowledges. Satua are the stories we tell to each other, derived from our own experiences or passed on to us by others; hearsay gleaned from newspapers and television; fictional creations; fairy tales. Many of the stories contained in this thesis - Pak De’s stories about the grandfathers who trained him, about his childhood in the ladang, about his teaching practices - are satua. My own stories about my life and research in Bali, about my experiences hearing tattwa narratives and trying to understand what they do, are satua. The Screenplay, while it has tattwa narratives embedded within it, is a work of my own creation, and thus it is satua.

Tattwa narratives make certain claims that many (non-Balinese) readers may find difficult to grasp, and even harder to believe. In the case of the Screenplay, the reader (who is asked to read as though watching the events unfold on the screen of their imagination) is both invited to suspend disbelief – this is a story, fictional, you don’t have to believe it – and, in a sense, is challenged not to suspend disbelief – there are narratives within this story that purport to be more than ‘just’ stories, and as such, you are implicitly called on to at least acknowledge that their truth claims are capable of generating real effects.

Through this Dissertation and through the Screenplay, I explore the efficacy of tattwa narratives, their ability to transform the way we experience the world, and their capacity to implicate people in the world which they create and maintain even when elements of that world are unfamiliar or difficult to comprehend. But more than this, by utilising both tattwa and satua to evoke the inspired characters of Gods and Goddesses, of trees and thoughts, of dragons and feelings, I hope to draw you into the world that tattwa narratives create, to bring its elements right up close, and enable them to resonate within you too.
In *The Skin of the Film*, Marks (2002:vii) describes the “contagious quality of cinema as something we viewers brush up against like another body”. This idea of ‘brushing up against’ brings to mind Pak De’s description of *tattwa* narratives as stories which engender intimacy, which bring things right up against each other and make them ‘erat’. It is this quality that I aim to impart through Screenplay and in this Dissertation.

Wayan and Made draw pictures for their Kumpi (great grandparents), 2004
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Gedung Kirtya Lontar Museum and Library in Singaraja, North Bali


Faculty of Arts at Udayana University in Denpasar Lontar Library
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Balinese Manuscript Collection at ANU

**Online guides to screenplay layout conventions**


Entrance to the ladang, the family farm near Tanah Lot
CHLOE LOVES TREES

A Screenplay

by

Anna Nettheim

Submitted to the University of New South Wales
Faculty of the College of Fine Arts
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2010
CHLOE LOVES TREES

OPENING SCENE

We open with a close-up of the play of light and shade through the moving leaves of a gum tree. The image is alive, mesmerising, but at first we are not sure what we are seeing. We hear a blend of sounds that are almost, but not quite identifiable, due to the faint ethereal WHISPERING overlaying them. Sound and image combine to create a sense of unfamiliarity.

A bird screeches, and as we draw back the source of the images is slowly revealed, and the ethereal WHISPERING fades against the more familiar sounds of a Sydney summer, wind RUSTLING the leaves of the tree, the HUMMING of cicadas, BIRDSONG.

EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY

From the top of a tall gum tree in a suburban backyard we look down on CHLOE MUNDY, 12, lying in the long grass far below. From this distance she appears to be just a little girl.

EXT. NELSON FRONT YARD. DAY

Chloe’s father, DAVE MUNDY, 40, goggles on, picks up a chainsaw and prepares to cut a thick branch off an old frangipani tree blocking a pathway. An old dual cab ute is parked on the street marked, DAVE MUNDY, LANDSCAPE GARDENER / ARBORIST, 0400758732.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Chloe’s mother, AYU MUNDY, 37, an attractive but frazzled looking Balinese Australian woman in nurse’s uniform, helps an elderly woman into a hospital bed.

INT. NINI’S KITCHEN. DAY

Chloe’s Balinese grandmother, NINI, an elegant woman of about 60, her hair wound up in Balinese-style bun, her feet bare, a bright yellow sash tied around the waist of her dress, pours coffee into two small cups.
EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY

We see the tree from Chloe’s point of view, as though we too are lying in the grass looking up into its branches. The light shines down through the leaves which ripple gently in the breeze, and the world seems full of life and movement.

EXT. NELSON FRONT YARD. DAY

The chainsaw is BUZZING, sparks are flying, Dave has almost cut through the branch.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Ayu talks to an old man sitting in a wheelchair by his bed. In another bed, an old man hooked up to various machines lies sleeping.

INT. NINI’S KITCHEN. DAY

Nini puts one of the coffee cups on a tray already holding a glass of water, a small plate of rice and crackers, and some colourful flowers. She picks up the tray.

EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY

We move down through the tree to where Chloe lies. As we get closer she begins to look her age. It is as though time has passed, as though she has been lying under the gum tree since she was a little girl. Beside her an open sketchbook reveals a detailed drawing of the tree she lies under. A sudden gust of wind shudders through the tree and Chloe sits up with a start. She looks anxiously at the dark clouds encroaching on the blue sky and gathers up her notebook and pencils.

EXT. NELSON FRONT YARD. DAY

Time and motion slow as the branch is cut through and sap oozes out of the trunk like blood from a wound. The branch falls with a THUD to the earth, scattering frangipani flowers around it.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Ayu stands at the doorway of a room watching two women her own age comfort each other beside the body of their mother, who lies in peace, eyes closed. She takes a deep breath and steps into the room.
INT. NINI’S LOUNGE ROOM. DAY

Nini kneels before a makeshift shrine on a sideboard in her living room. On the shrine is a photograph of her deceased husband, a handsome Australian man. She has placed the tray in front of it. Incense burns in a glass beside it. She picks up some flowers, dips them into the water, then with a graceful gesture wafts the essence of food, water, flowers and incense towards the photograph.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

The Mundy home is comfortable if slightly shabby. The furniture is a little ragged around the edges, and the whole place could do with a paint job. Ayu, still in uniform, is preparing dinner. In the background, Chloe and her brother, JACK, 7, sprawl on the couch watching television. Outside the kitchen window, wind whips through the trees in the garden.

AYU
Can you run out and get me some parsley, Chloe?

CHLOE
I don’t want to. It’s too windy.

JACK
I’ll go. It’s just wind.

Jack gets up and Ayu makes a face at him.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

The family are eating dinner together. Ayu and Dave are both still dressed in their work clothes.

JACK
Mum, can you take me to the skate park next weekend.

AYU
We’ll see. I was thinking we might go to Nini’s for lunch next Saturday.

JACK
Yaay.

Dave looks put out.
DAVE
I’m working Saturday.

AYU
I didn’t know that. I thought we could all go to Mum’s together. It’s been weeks.

DAVE
You might have checked with me first.

JACK
Can I take my DS?

AYU
No. (to Dave) Couldn’t you change it to Sunday?

DAVE
No, I couldn’t. I have another job booked for Sunday.

JACK
Can I take my skateboard?

CHLOE
(anxious)
Nini won’t mind, Mum. She’ll understand, Dad. I’ll tell her you had to work.

Dave and Ayu glare at each other. They both look ready for a confrontation, but then Dave turns away and ruffles Jack’s hair, and Ayu gets up and starts clearing the table.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

MS HENDON, an enthusiastic teacher in her 20s, stands before a whiteboard with the heading, Who are you? written across the top. Underneath this are subheadings: Family Background, Maps, Languages, Religion, Ceremonies, Arts, Music, Dance. Hand coloured flags from different countries are pegged on a line above their heads. There are many countries represented but only one Indonesian flag. She addresses a multicultural class of Year 6 public school students.

MISS HENDON
Some of you may need two maps or more, others will only need one.
MARK (ANGLO BOY)
(cheers)

MISS HENDON (CONT’D)
But I still expect a poster sized presentation from each of you. And you will each perform something from your own family’s culture for the class. It could be a traditional dance, or a musical piece. You might want to sing a song, or you could read a poem ...

A group of boys up the back of the room erupt, some groan with embarrassment, others start mock singing.

MISS HENDON
Quiet up the back please. If you want to do your performance with a friend you need to talk to me first. This is your chance to share something with the class about where your family comes from and who you are. You can choose to tell your story however you like. This will be your final assignment for the term, so I am going to give you the next few weeks to prepare your projects and you can present them during the last couple of weeks.

There is an immediate outburst of chattering as the kids discuss what they might do. ZINA, a new Iranian student, sits quietly among them, carefully copying down the teacher’s instructions. Chloe is sitting next to KATE, a pretty blond girl.

KATE
What are you going to do, Chloe?

Chloe, looking worried, shrugs, and Kate turns to ask MAYA, a pretty Indian girl sitting at the next desk.

EXT. MUNDY BACKYARD. DAY

The Mundy family’s backyard is spacious and unkempt. Dave’s ute sticks out of a ramshackle garage at the end of a driveway leading out to the street. The gum tree, situated
between the back of the house and the garage, dominates the yard although there are smaller trees and shrubs around the garden's periphery. A couple of battered kids' bicycles and a skateboard lie on the ground in the driveway.

Chloe sits leaning against the gum tree, books around her, drawing something in her sketch book. Jack comes flying out the back door and runs towards the garage but stops when he notices her.

**JACK**
What are you doing?

**CHLOE**
What does it look like?

**JACK**
Drawing?

Chloe glances at the atlas beside her and rubs out part of her drawing again.

**JACK**
Do you wanna come and play?

**CHLOE**
Later.

Jack grabs his skateboard and runs up the driveway. Chloe looks at her picture and we see she is copying a map of Bali from an atlas. She seems to be having trouble and the paper is smudged from her efforts. She screws it up.

**EXT. MULLOWAY ROAD. DAY**

The Mundy house is in a quiet cul de sac. Jack and a couple of other boys are riding skateboards up and down the road. A couple of little kids ride tricycles on the sidewalk as their mothers chat. Chloe, in cut off jeans and an old t-shirt, peers down the road as though looking for someone. Across the street, Zina is getting into an old car with her younger sister and their parents. The girls wear fancy matching dresses as though they might be going to a party. Their father carries a prayer mat and their mother wears a headscarf. Zina gives Chloe a shy smile. Chloe returns it and takes a step towards her. But just then Kate comes riding down the street on a very flash pink bicycle. She pulls up beside Chloe. She is dressed in the latest teen fashion.
KATE
OMG (Oh My God) – check out the new girl!

CHLOE
(embarrassed)
Shhh.

KATE
What?

As they speak Zina gets in the car and her dad drives away.

CHLOE
I think she heard you.

KATE
Whatever.

CHLOE
What do you want to do?

KATE
Actually, I just came to tell you I can’t play. I’m going to Maya’s. See ya.

Kate turns and rides back down the street, leaving Chloe standing on the sidewalk, looking forlorn.

INT. NINI’S LOUNGE ROOM. DAY

Ayu, Chloe and Jack are standing in Nini’s lounge room with Nini, who Ayu calls Memek or Mek. Nini’s home is clean and tidy, typically Australian in many instances, although this is belied by the shrine set up on the sideboard. There are a few other traces of Bali such as a large traditional-style painting over the fireplace and some wood carvings arranged on a shelf. In one corner of the room a chess board is set up ready to play.

Nini wears an apron over a smart skirt and blouse, but is barefoot and her long, still black hair is again wound up in a Balinese style bun. When she speaks her English is good, but bears the slight accent and occasional incorrect grammar of one who has migrated as an adult.

All talking at once.
AYU
Sorry we’re so late. I got held up at work.

CHLOE
Can you help me with my assignment, Nini?

NINI
(to Ayu) Sing ken ken.

JACK
I brought my skateboard...

CHLOE
It’s about culture.

JACK
... so I can show you my new trick.

NINI
Such a clever boy!

AYU
How are you, Mek?

Jack heads to the chess set and starts moving the pieces around. Chloe walks over to the shrine and looks at the photo of her grandfather. Nini and Ayu take each other in with equal concern. Nini is bright but Ayu looks tired.

NINI
Kenken, Yu? Negak,negak.

She gestures for Ayu to take a seat but Ayu takes no notice.

AYU
I’m fine Mek. It smells great in here. What are you cooking?

She walks through to the kitchen and Nini and Chloe follow.

INT. NINI’S KITCHEN. DAY

The kitchen table is set with bowls of fried crackers and condiments. Several pots are bubbling on the stove, beside which there are is a plate containing different kinds of chilli. On the counter a large rice cooker is steaming alongside other objects not standard to the average Anglo-
Australian kitchen, such as different sized mortar and pestles, and a big clay wok. Jars of spices line the shelves. A small courtyard off the kitchen is full of pots of fresh herbs and colourful flowers.

Ayu goes over to the stove where she dips, stirs and smells things.

NINI
(following her, insistent)
Ada napi? Ayu gelem?

She puts her hand up to Ayu’s forehead to feel for a temperature. Ayu moves away.

AYU
I’m fine, Mek, just a bit tired.
Mmm. You made Be Siap.

While Ayu’s English is flawless Australian English the Balinese words roll off her tongue easily.

NINI
This one Chloe’s favourite.

Nini puts her arm around Chloe and notices she is almost as tall as she is.

NINI (CONT’D)
Aduh! Suba gede, cucun tiange.

Chloe smiles at her grandmother but it is unclear whether or not she understands what she has said. Jack appears in the doorway.

NINI (CONT’D)
And this one Jack’s favourite.

She stirs a second saucepan. Jack grabs a mouthful of crackers from the table and stuffs them into his mouth.

AYU
Jack. You’ll ruin your lunch.

Jack grins at her through a mouthful of crackers.

CHLOE
You’re disgusting.
Nini ladles something from one of the pots onto the small tray we saw earlier and carries it out of the kitchen. Chloe and Jack follow her.

**INT. NINI’S LOUNGEROOM. DAY**

Nini places the tray down in front of the photograph on her makeshift shrine. It holds a glass of water, a little bowl containing rice and other bits of food from the meal she has been preparing, and flowers from the courtyard garden. She kneels before it and lights a couple of sticks of incense and places them on the tray. Again she dips the flowers into the water and the graceful gesture we saw earlier wafts the essence of the food and the incense towards the photo. Then she raises her hands to her forehead in Balinese prayer position.

**JACK**
(whispering)
What’s she doing?

**CHLOE**
She’s praying for Pop.

**JACK**
Is he gonna eat the food? Is he a ghost now?

**CHLOE**
Shhh.

Jack raises his hands in Christian prayer position.

**JACK**
Amen.

**INT. NINI’S KITCHEN. DAY**

The family are at the table passing bowls of food around. Nini hands a bowl of *rendang* to Jack.

**NINI**
This one no chilli.

Jack picks up a big red chilli from a bowl and raises it to his mouth as though he is about to eat it.

**JACK**
Dare me, dare me, Chloe?
Chloe ignores him. Jack drops the chilli back into the bowl.

JACK
Remember when Pop ate three of these and smoke came out of his ears?

Nini smiles at him, but Ayu gives him a warning look and Chloe nudges him.

CHLOE
Can you help me with my assignment, Nini?

INT. NINI’S LOUNGEROOM. DAY

Chloe and Nini sit at the dining room table, an old map of Bali spread out before them. Chloe has her sketchbook open in front of her showing the outline of a map of Bali. Ayu is napping on the couch. Jack has returned to the chess set. Nini points to a tiny dot on the south west region of the map.

NINI
My village right here.

Chloe marks the spot on the map of Bali in her sketchbook.

CHLOE
Didn’t you ever want to go back?

NINI
One time we go back, when Ayu still a girl.

CHLOE
You took Mum?

Chloe, surprised, looks over to where Ayu lies, as though for confirmation, but Ayu has fallen asleep.

NINI
Here is mountain, and here. This is Mount Agung. My grandmother, your great grandmother, Chloe, she call it Gunung Tohlangkir, the highest mountain.

Chloe starts drawing Mount Agung on her own map.
NINI
But in olden times, Bali not like this. No people, no mountains, no trees.

Jack wonders over to join them at the table.

NINI
All this mountain come from the dragons.

JACK
There’s no such thing as dragons. Is there? Are there really dragons in the world?

NINI
Not now. But long long time ago, in Bad Zaman Bari ...

She pauses to think of the right words in English words.

NINI
... the Ancient Time.

The children watch her expectantly. As Nini talks, Chloe sketches, but instead of seeing what she is actually drawing we segue into a detailed animation of what she imagines as she listens to Nini.

The animation comes alive with the slow and rhythmic flow of Nini’s voice. The images are detailed and fantastical, and in the style of traditional Balinese artworks like the one on Nini’s mantelpiece.

NINI
Nah, kene. In that time, the land in Bali is low, there is water everywhere, like a swamp. Our great great ancestor, Kaki Tua (depicted as an old man demigod) thinks, if the land like this, how can things grow here, how can things live here? How can people live here? So he call dragons to come down to Bali from the land of the gods. He send those dragons to get earth.
The dragons go to Mount Semeru and Mount Arjuna in Java and Mount Himalaya in India. They bring back earth from this mountain and put it around Bali, here, and here, and here. They make the shape of the land. Because of these piles of earth the land is flat here, mountain here, hill here, and here too, behind my father’s village, behind your great grandfather’s village ‘nik.

As Nini stops talking, the animation freezes on one of the dragons, which segues back into a sketch of a dragon that Chloe has been drawing beside her map. Chloe looks up from the page to see where Nini is pointing.

JACK
(dubious)
Is that a true story, Nini?

NINI
(smiling)
Not story, Jack. My father call this one tattwa.

CHLOE
What does that mean?

NINI
Tattwa mean those words from the Ancient Times, that tell us about the world. That tell us we are just the same as this world. Those animals and trees and mountains are part of us.

EXT. MUNDY BACKYARD. DAY

Chloe and Jack are kicking a soccer ball around in the backyard. Chloe kicks the ball to Jack.

JACK
Is that the best you can do?
Useless!

CHLOE
Get lost, I can kick better than you can.
JACK
Well, I can throw better.

He chucks the ball at Chloe and it slams into her. Chloe lets out an exaggerated howl.

CHLOE
You’ve had it now, little boy.

Ayu starts to chase Jack and he runs off. He reaches the gum tree and swings himself up and out of Chloe’s reach. Chloe reaches the tree but stops short. We hear, very faintly, a WHINING noise. Unlike the ethereal whispering we noticed in the opening scene, this is slightly disturbing. Chloe puts her hand up to her head as though dizzy and takes a couple of steps back. The WHINING dies away.

JACK (taunting)
Come and get me.

Chloe steps towards the tree again. Again she hears the WHINING. She stops and rubs her hand against her temple.

CHLOE
What’s that?

JACK
What?

CHLOE
That ... noise?

Jack drops out of the tree but still keeps his distance from Chloe. He looks around, hearing nothing, then whispers conspiratorially,

JACK (CONT’D)
What is it?

Chloe steps away from the tree.

CHLOE
Nothing. It’s stopped now.

She turns and walks away from him towards the house, touching her head as she goes.
INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

The family are all in the lounge room. Chloe and Jack are doing homework at the dining table. Dave is helping Jack with his maths homework as Ayu sorts through a mountain of washing.

AYU
I said I’d take Memek shopping tomorrow afternoon before my shift starts. Can you get the kids from aftercare?

DAVE
Okay.

AYU
I’m worried about her being on her own so much. I wish she lived closer.

JACK
I wish she lived with us. Why can’t she come and live with us?

Ayu and Chloe both look at Dave.

DAVE
Your grandma has her own home, mate. Old people need a bit of peace and quiet, not a house full of squabbling kids.

JACK
Dad, did you know Nini gives food to Pop’s ghost!

Dave raises his eyebrows and glances over at Ayu.

CHLOE
My head feels funny.

DAVE
Is that right? When did all this start?

Ayu reddens a little, and avoids meeting his eyes. She turns to Jack.
AYU
It’s just her way of praying for Pop, honey. It’s the way they do things in Bali.

She addresses Dave.

AYU
I invited her over for lunch next weekend.

DAVE
I’ll be working.

Ayu gives Dave a look of irritation. Chloe notices and jumps up from the table.

CHLOE
Can I help, Mum.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

Dave is at the dining table working on his books. Chloe is working on her presentation. An old computer is on in the background and there are some internet printouts spread around her from which she is copying flags, symbols etc onto her poster. She turns a page and comes across her dragon picture.

CHLOE
Nini told us that all the mountains in Bali were made by dragons.

DAVE
(laughs)
You know that’s just a fairy tale, Chloe.

Chloe, hurt by his rebuff, goes on with her work in silence.

INT. CHLOE’S ROOM. NIGHT

Chloe’s room is a child’s room, messy, littered with sneakers, balls and half-finished art and craft projects. Clothes are piled carelessly on a chair and spill onto the floor. There are no signs of the encroaching teen years. The walls are decorated with art gallery posters, pictures of dogs, and her own artwork: a sketch of her house, another of a boy riding a bike. Her love of trees is also
evident. There is a drawing of the big tree in the backyard, a photo of a younger Chloe being pushed by her dad on a swing hanging from the tree, and a collage of dried autumn leaves. A mobile made of dried leaves, berries, and seed pods hangs above her desk which is buried in a mix of school books and art supplies.

Chloe is in bed and Ayu is putting clothes away as they talk.

CHLOE
How come you never talk about when you went to Bali?

AYU
Oh, well, I was only there the one time.

CHLOE
Can we go there one day? What was it like?

AYU
We went for my grandmother’s funeral.

She sits down on the edge of Chloe’s bed.

CHLOE
Was it really sad?

AYU
I guess. Look, you know Nini’s family didn’t want her to marry Pop.

Chloe nods at what is a familiar story.

AYU (CONT’D)
She was supposed to marry someone from her village. Her mother said if she married Pop she could never come back. Then a few years after she left her dad died, but she was pregnant with me so she couldn’t go back for his funeral.

CHLOE
Poor Nini.
AYU
I had always dreamed of going to Bali, but it wasn’t how I imagined at all. Nini’s brothers were still angry with her. They wouldn’t let her help with the ceremonies. And my cousins laughed when I tried to speak to them in Balinese. They called me ‘tourist’.

CHLOE
Well, they sound really horrible, but we don’t have to go there. We could stay in a hotel near the beach like Amy’s family did.

AYU
(stands up)
You don’t understand, Chloe. Your Pop always treated me and Nini like we were princesses. In Bali, we were treated as though we were nothing at all. I don’t want to go back.

EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY
Dave sits on the back porch drinking coffee and looking through a book about gardens. Chloe and Jack are playing with a frisbee in the yard. They run and shout until the frisbee gets stuck in the tree. Jack leaps onto the lower branch and starts clambering up the tree but the frisbee is just out his reach.

JACK
I can’t get it, Chloe. Come and help me.

As Chloe approaches the tree we hear the strange WHINING again, only this time it is louder and more intense. Chloe stops, steps back, rubs at her temple and looks over to her dad. It is clear that he hasn’t noticed anything.

CHLOE
Let’s play something else.

JACK
Come on Chloe, you can reach it. Don’t be a chicken.
Dave looks up from his paper.

DAVE
She’s not chicken, are ya Chloe?

Chloe doesn’t answer.

DAVE (CONT’D)
You used to climb this tree all the time.

Chloe looks at him, she seems anxious.

DAVE (CONT’D)
Did you take a fall or something?

He puts his book down, gets up and heads towards her.

DAVE (CONT’D)
I’ll give you a leg up, then you’ll be right.

Chloe starts backing away from him and from the tree. As she does the WHINING dies down altogether.

CHLOE
I don’t want you to. My head feels funny. I don’t want to.

She continues to back away but trips over Jack’s skateboard and falls to the ground. She looks up at Jack accusingly, tears welling in her eyes.

CHLOE (CONT’D)
You stupid idiot.

Jack looks to his dad for support but Dave has been distracted by something in the tree. There are some yellow leaves on the tree and when he looks down he sees that more litter the ground below. At that moment Ayu walks out the back door, wearing her nurse’s uniform, and the kids don’t notice what Dave is looking at.

Ayu notices Chloe on the ground.

AYU
Hi there. What’s up?

Chloe jumps up and runs over to hug her.
CHLOE
I don’t feel good. My head feels bad.

Jack climbs down from the tree.

Jack
Muum, Chloe called me an idiot.

AYU
What’s going on?

Dave
Usual squabbling. I’m going to work.

He scoops up a handful of leaves, shoves them into his pocket and heads for the ute.

EXT. MANSION GROUNDS. DAY

Dave is working in the extensive grounds of a stately mansion. The garden is beautiful, well tended and blooming with flowers and young shrubs as well as old established trees. He is on his knees patting down and mulching the newly turned earth around a small tree he has just planted. He works with tenderness and obvious satisfaction. Around him are empty pots, cuttings, leaf rakings, potting mix and gardening tools.

EXT. STREET. DAY

Dave is having trouble starting the ute. It is loaded up with branches and cuttings from the job he has just finished. He gets out, opens the bonnet and sees there is a problem.

DAVE
Shit!

He takes out his phone.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND. LATE AFTERNOON

The playground is almost deserted. A couple of mothers and their kids are chatting by the gate. Chloe is skipping with Kate and Maya. Jack is playing a game by himself. A carer is getting ready to lock up the aftercare school room while keeping half an eye on the kids.
Maya and Chloe turn the rope while Kate skips and they all chant:

**TOGETHER**
My mamma told me, if I was
goody, that she would buy me, a
rubber dolly, my sister told
her, I kissed a soldier...

Kate misses a beat and stops, the girls are all laughing.

**MAYA**
Ooh, Katie kissed a soldier! I
bet his name was M A R...

**KATE**
(shrieking with laughter)
Stop it. I know who you like
Maya, it’s J U S...

Chloe, still holding the rope, is clearly not part of this boy oriented teasing and giggling. A car horn honks and Maya grabs her bag and runs off. Kate takes the rope from Chloe and starts packing it away.

**KATE**
Why is your dad always so late?

**CHLOE**
He’ll be here really soon. I’m sure he will.

**KATE**
My mum’s going to ask Maya’s mum
to pick me up instead. She always comes on time.

Chloe looks down at her feet.

**KATE**
Maya’s coming for a sleepover this weekend. We’re going to do makeovers.

This comment draws our attention to the fact that while Chloe is dressed like a dishevelled tomboy, Kate has done fancy things to her hair, wears sparkly pink socks, and has a school bag plastered with stickers of teen pop stars.
CHLOE
(hopeful)
What night?

KATE
Friday, but I’m only allowed to have one friend over.

A car horn in the distance cuts the exchange short and helps Chloe hide her disappointment. Dave has arrived to pick them up. It is almost dark. The girls and Jack grab their bags and run towards the ute.

INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY

Chloe is working on her assignment at the computer. Jack is constructing a world of lego on the floor. Dave comes in. He takes his mobile phone out of his pocket and pulls some yellow leaves out with it. He puts them on the table by the home phone, picks it up and makes a call.

DAVE
Phil? Dave Mundy here.
(pause) Yeah. Actually, just a problem at home I wanted to run by you. Got a big old gum out the back that’s dropping yellow leaves. (pause) That’s what I’m thinking.(pause)Yeah, yeah. I know. (pause) Yeah, that’d be great.

Chloe has noticed the leaves and is confused by the call.

CHLOE
What is it?

DAVE
I want you both to stay out of the gum tree for the moment. It’s sick.

Jack has come over to join them and Dave shows him the leaves. As Chloe picks up a couple of leaves and rubs them gently between her fingers something dawns on her.

CHLOE
(softly, to herself)
It’s sick! But you can make it better, can’t you dad?
DAVE
I’m not sure if I can, Chlo’. Not if it’s what I think it is. Mundulla Yellow’s a fatal disease. It’ll kill the tree eventually, but in the meantime there’s a real risk of windsnap.

JACK
What’s that?

DAVE
It means, buddy, even a light breeze could cause it to drop a whopping great branch. If I’m right I’m gonna have to cut it down.

Chloe
You can’t. I love that tree. We have to look after it. You can’t kill it just because it’s sick.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

The family sit together around the dinner table, eating sausages, mashed potatoes and salad.

JACK
... and then he fell on his B - U - T!

Jack laughs uproariously at his own joke, and looks around for a response but only Chloe seems to have heard and she is glaring at him.

AYU
Can you pick up the kids from school tomorrow?

CHLOE
You’re so gross.

JACK
B - U - T! Get it?

DAVE
I have my gardening job. You’re supposed to get them on Thursdays.
Jack is pouring tomato sauce all over his food, and still chuckling at his joke.

Chloe
Mum, look what he’s doing. He’s so disgusting!

AYU
I asked Matron for some extra shifts. I could hardly tell her no when she offered me one.

Jack is swirling everything around in the sauce.

JACK
Yummy.

Chloe puts down her knife and fork.

CHLOE
Mum. Tell him to stop.

DAVE
It’s just two days, Ayu. My only regular job, yet you still expect me to drop everything at a moment’s notice. I’m trying to run a business.

AYU
I was working.

DAVE
I tried calling you but you didn’t answer your phone.

CHLOE
Can’t we ride our bikes to school, then dad wouldn’t have to pick us up.

AYU
Darling, I don’t think Jack’s old enough for that yet. (to Dave) Couldn’t they go to aftercare?

CHLOE
I’m old enough. I can look after Jack.
JACK
I hate aftercare. The food stinks and the carers are all fat, fat, fat.

AYU
Jack, you mustn’t say that. It’s unkind. The carers are very nice to you.

DAVE
They’re full on Thursdays. I already told you that. But obviously my work isn’t as important as yours.

AYU
We agreed I’d take on some extra shifts in case you’ve forgotten.

DAVE
As if you’d let me.

JACK
(singing)
Fat, fat, fat, fat, fat.

Chloe stands up. She is close to tears.

CHLOE
Shut up!

She runs out of the room, surprising the rest of the family into silence.

INT. CHLOE’S ROOM. NIGHT

Chloe is lying on her stomach on the floor, working on the tree sketch we saw in the first scene. As she draws, we segue from the page to the animated scenes of her imagination which are again much more complicated and sophisticated than what she actually draws.

Animation – Chloe and Jack are little figures huddled together under the tree in the midst of a raging cyclonic storm. Pop has been blown far off into the distance, Nini is being drawn steadily away, Kate and Maya blow away together, giggling all the while, Ayu and Dave glare at each other as they are dragged away from the centre of the storm in different directions.
There is a tapping noise, then, as Ayu opens the door, the animated figures of Chloe and Jack segue back into Chloe’s actual drawing, a fairly innocuous depiction of Chloe and Jack standing together under a tree. Chloe has glued the yellow leaves around its base. She pulls another drawing over it and looks up.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Ayu walks into a room where BERTHA, an elderly woman, is resting. Ayu picks up the folder at the end of her bed.

    Ayu
    How’s that hip settling in Bertha?

    BERTHA
    Not bad. Less pain today.

    AYU
    That’s great. We’ll have you up and about in no time.

Bertha looks a little despondent at the thought.

    BERTHA
    I’m in no rush. At least there’s company in here.

There is a card with a photo of a couple and three children on the bedside table. Ayu picks up the photo.

    AYU
    Are these your grandchildren?

Bertha brightens a little.

    BERTHA
    Yes, the loves. Aren’t they a treat? And that’s my daughter there.

    AYU
    They’re beautiful. Do you see much of them?

    BERTHA
    Haven’t seen them for five years. They live in Canada.

Ayu sits down on the side of her bed.
AYU
Do you have any other children?

BERTHA
Just the one. What about you, love?

AYU
Two, one of each. Both still in primary school.

BERTHA
Lovely. Enjoy them while they’re young.

Suddenly she grabs onto Ayu’s hand, her tone urgent.

BERTHA (CONT’D)
Hear me? They grow up just like that and then they’re gone.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Ayu is walking down the hospital corridor punching a number into her mobile phone.

AYU
Mek? It’s Ayu. How are you?

She laughs at something her mother has said and sits down in an empty waiting room to chat.

EXT. TUCKER BACK YARD. DAY

Dave and Mr Tucker stand in his backyard looking up at a tree whose branches are blocking the view of the yard from the upstairs balcony as well as getting close to the electricity wires.

TUCKER
I need it cut back before the weekend.

DAVE
There shouldn’t be a problem getting a permit, but you won’t get one before the weekend.

Tucker is unperturbed.
TUCKER
I’m paying cash in hand. If you won’t do it, there’s plenty that will.

Dave looks up at the tree. He could really do with the cash.

(later)

Dave is in a harness up high in the tree with his chainsaw running. Several large branches lie on the ground below. He turns off the chainsaw and swings down to the ground. As he does, a tough looking guy covered in tattoos sticks his head over the fence.

MICK
Hey, what do you think you’re doing?

Dave takes off his earphones.

DAVE
Sorry?

MICK
What do you think you’re doing?

DAVE
I’m just taking off a couple of branches for Mr Tucker. They were getting too close to the wires.

MICK
That’s your story. Now where’s your permit?

Mr Tucker comes out of his house and Mick shoots him a triumphant grin.

MICK (CONT’D)
I said, where’s your permit, mate? Weren’t expecting me back yet, were you, you old codger.

EXT. MICK’S FRONT YARD. DAY

Dave and Mick are out the front of Mick’s house. Mick leans against a flash looking sports car parked behind Dave’s ute. All the cards are in his hand.
MICK
Your mate Tucker had it coming.

DAVE
Come on Mate, It was just a couple of branches.

MICK
Yeah, broke the law and now he’s pissing himself, isn’t he?

DAVE
This is going to hurt me, not him.

Mick regards Dave with renewed interest.

MICK
Is that right?

Dave is nervous now, realising he’s said the wrong thing.

DAVE
Perhaps we could come to some sort of arrangement?

MICK
Oh yeah?

DAVE
I could do some work on your garden, or something.

MICK
(slowly)
Tell you what, Mate, you can help me by getting rid of this great whopping monster so I can put my garage up.

He points to the beautiful flowering magnolia tree in the corner of his front yard that spills over into Tucker’s yard.

DAVE
You’ll never get a permit to do that.
MICK
That’s what the last bloke said, but I reckon an expert like yourself can see that it’s got a nasty disease. I’m sure Tucker will keep his trap shut this time.

DAVE
If they do an inspection I could lose my licence.

MICK
Oh yeah. Whereas if I dob ya in...?

Dave looks back at the tree.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

The kids are in bed, the house is in chaos, the kitchen not tidied up from dinner. Dave sits at the kitchen table working on his books. Ayu walks in, still in her uniform and looking exhausted. She surveys the mess, looks at Dave, then starts tidying up rather perfunctorily.

AYU
So the kids were okay getting back by themselves?

DAVE
Fine.

AYU
And Chloe got Jack afternoon tea and everything?

DAVE
I guess. I wasn’t here, was I?

AYU
What’s wrong?

DAVE
Nothing!

He gets up and leaves the room, taking his book with him. Ayu flings some cutlery into the sink in frustration. She stand there for a moment, fuming, then resumes cleaning up.
EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND. DAY

It is lunchtime and Chloe, skipping rope in hand, approaches Kate and Maya who sit eating lunch together on a bench under a tree. They are dressed identically, with their hair in braids and sparkling bindies on their foreheads.

CHLOE
I couldn’t find you at recess.

MAYA
We were in the library.

KATE
We’ve been designing our costumes. We’re doing Bollywood Dancing. What are you going to do?

CHLOE
But you’re not Indian.

KATE
Actually, my grandfather lived in India for like ages, so I’m practically part Indian. Come on Maya. Let’s go and practice.

They walk off, giggling, arms intertwined. Chloe, abandoned, steps towards the seat where they had been sitting. As she does she hears the ethereal WHISPERING noise we heard in the opening scene. She looks up at the tree, steps back and stands still for a moment, as though listening. Then she steps over the bench and sits down on the earth at the base of the tree, leans back against its trunk and closes her eyes. The WHISPERING Continues. Across the playground, Zina sits by herself, watching Chloe.

EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY

Chloe is exploring the trees in her garden in a deliberate and attentive manner. She walks around the periphery of the yard where a couple of shrubs grow, stroking her hand down the trunk of one of them, running her fingers over the leaves of another. She walks slowly towards the big tree in the centre of the garden, then stops and backs away, hand to her head. She returns to the shrubs, touching, testing. Then she lies down on the grass with one ear pressed into the earth as though listening for something. We are not
close enough to her to hear whatever it is she may be hearing.

She hasn’t noticed that Jack has come out and is watching her from the back door.

    JACK
    What are you doing?

    CHLOE
    (startled)
    Nothing.

She jumps up and walks towards the house.

    JACK
    Can I play?

    CHLOE
    (rudely)
    No. (more gently.) I was just looking for something.

INT. MUNDY HOME. PARENT’S BEDROOM. DAY

Ayu sits in front of her dressing table taking off her makeup and putting on moisturiser. Chloe is lying on her bed looking through a book of photos of Bali. She stops on a page showing Balinese women and girls dressed up for temple.

    CHLOE
    I have to do a performance, a song or something.

    AYU
    Nini used to sing Balinese songs to me when I was little but I can’t remember any of them now.

    CHLOE
    I can’t sing a Balinese song. I wouldn’t even know what it meant.

Jack comes running in, and starts jumping on the bed. Chloe slams the book shut and stands up.

    JACK
    Mum, Mum, can you help with my maths homework, I can’t do it.
CHLOE
Go away.

JACK
Muuuum.

AYU
I’ll be there in a minute, Jack.

Jack idles away as slowly as he can to annoy Chloe. When he’s gone, Chloe gets up off the bed and approaches Ayu.

CHLOE
Don’t you know anything about where you come from?

AYU
But I’m Australian. This is where I come from.

CHLOE
But you’re Balinese too, aren’t you?

AYU
Chloe, things were different when Nini came out here. Migrants were expected to assimilate and Nini did a really good job of it. I thought Balinese was our own secret language until I heard her speaking it to one of her friends. After that I didn’t want her to speak it anymore.

CHLOE
Why?

Ayu struggles a little to articulate something she hasn’t ever expressed before.

AYU
I don’t think Pop knew she spoke Balinese when we were on our own. He was so proud of how well she’d adapted, I thought he’d be upset if he knew she was still Balinese. I guess I tried to make up for that by being
Australian enough for both of us.

Chloe stands behind her mother so we see them both reflected in the mirror. She watches as her mother twists her hair up into a bun just like Nini wears, like the Balinese women and girls in the photo.

**CHLOE**
You didn’t want to be Balinese?

**AYU**
I told you, until I went to my grandmother’s funeral, Bali was just stories to me.

**CHLOE**
But why don’t you ever tell any of those stories to us?

**AYU**
(shrugs)
They’re not my stories to tell.

**INT. CLASSROOM. DAY**

**MISS HENDON**
Today we are going make a start on our presentations. Barry has kindly volunteered to go first.

Barry, the Anglo boy from the start stands up and displays his piece of cardboard which features a big map of Australia, the Australian coat of arms, the Australian flag, and pictures of Australian animals.

**BARRY**
I come from Australia, and my mum and dad come from Australia, and my grandparents are all Australian too. So, today I’m going to tell you a little bit about this wonderful country called Australia. This is what it looks like (points to map, roughly coloured in). This is our national flag.

**MATES**
Derrrr!
BARRY (CONT’D)
And this is our coat of arms. Our cultural practices include watching the footy, hanging out at the beach, and going bush (mates laugh appreciatively). We also like to have a laugh.

He throws the piece of cardboard onto the teacher’s desk.

BARRY
Today I’m going to perform a legendary Australian poem called The Man From Ironbark, by Banjo Patterson.

He puts on an Akubra hat and immediately switches from his class clown swagger into serious performance mode, with the accent, body language, and confidence of a born actor.

BARRY (CONT’D)
It was the man from Ironbark who struck the Sydney town, He wandered over street and park, he wandered up and down. He loitered here, he loitered there, till he was like to drop, Until at last in sheer despair he sought a barber's shop.

Cut to

And whether he's believed or no, there's one thing to remark, That flowing beards are all the go way up in Ironbark.

He bows to the rowdy applause of the class and loud cheers from his mates. Zina is clapping politely but is clearly puzzled by the performance. Kate turns and whispers loudly to Maya.

KATE
What do you reckon Zina’s going to do? She can’t even speak English yet.

Chloe, embarrassed, glances at Zina, who has obviously heard Kate too.
INT. MUNDY HOME. MORNING.

The radio is on in the kitchen, and the Saturday papers spread across the table. Dave is dressed but the kids and Ayu are still in their pyjamas. Chloe is doing a crossword, Dave is reading the employment section, and Jack is reading the cartoons. The phone rings and Ayu answers it. She walks out of the room for a moment and then comes back.

AYU
That was Matron. She needs me to come in.

DAVE
Now? You said you had the weekend off. I've got a job this morning.

AYU
Well you’ll just have to take the kids with you.

She walks out of the room without engaging with Dave and his anger

DAVE
Great.

He stands up and shouts after her.

DAVE
Just great.

He notices the kids watching him. They look worried, frightened even. He grins widely and feigns great enthusiasm.

DAVE (CONT’D)
Great! Get dressed kids. You’re coming to work with me today.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET. DAY

Dave is setting up tree lopping equipment under a big old tree on a client’s front lawn. Jack is helping him, but Chloe sits hunched and miserable in the passenger seat of the ute.

DAVE
Come on out of there, Chloe, I could use your help.
Chloe pretends not to hear him. Dave is losing his patience.

DAVE (CONT’D)
Chloe!

Chloe slinks out of the car and stands eyes downcast at the side of the road. Dave looks at her sternly and she edges closer to the tree. As she does the WHISPERING noise starts up. She glances at the tree, and in that instance sees an unclear smoky shape beside the tree that dissolves almost as quickly as she sees it. BOB, an old bloke, stands watching from the front porch.

BOB
If I had my way you’d be cutting the whole blasted tree down.

Chloe glares at Bob as he speaks. The WHISPERING remains intense but it doesn’t cause her to hold her head or move away from the tree.

BOB (CONT’D)
I told that council bloke I wanted to get rid of it and he straight out refused. No can do. Just like that. Can you believe it? Can’t cut down my own flipping tree in my own flipping yard.

DAVE
(under his breath)
I know what you mean.

BOB
The number of times I’m up and down the ladder cleaning the darned gutters.

DAVE
Once we take off these two branches you shouldn’t have a problem with the gutters.

The WHISPERING continues and Chloe is acting strangely, turning away from the tree, then quickly back again, as though trying to catch somebody hiding behind it. She repeats those actions again and again.
DAVE (CONT’D)
Jack, you stand there next to
the truck and don’t move until I
say. Chloe, when the first
branch comes down I want you and
Jack to drag it over to the
truck for me.

Bob has noticed what Chloe is doing and is watching her
quizzically. Dave puts his goggles on, climbs the ladder
and turns on the chainsaw. As he touches the saw to the
tree the noise of the chainsaw is joined by a high pitched
WHINING, which affects Chloe like fingernails on a
blackboard. She clamps her hands over her ears.

CHLOE
(screaming)
STOP!

Dave hears her and turns off the chainsaw. He gets to Chloe
as quickly as he can. She is pale and stricken. The
WHINING has lessened considerably.

DAVE
Chloe, what’s wrong? What is it?

CHLOE
Don’t cut it, Daddy. Don’t hurt
it.

DAVE
What? I’m not hurting it. It’s
a tree, Chloe. I’m pruning it.
I’m just doing my job.

He is both baffled and annoyed by her behaviour but she is
genuinely shaking and he doesn’t want a further scene in
front of Bob who is watching with interest.

DAVE
Sorry, Bob. She hasn’t been
feeling well. The noise is
bothering her. I’d better take
her home. I’ll have to come back
and finish up tomorrow.

He puts her arm around Chloe and leads her towards the
truck where Jack still stands, his eyes fixed on Chloe.
INT. LOUNGE ROOM. NIGHT.

Dave is sitting in front of the TV. The room is strewn with the kids’ toys and books. Ayu walks into the room and sits down beside him. Dave turns off the TV.

DAVE
Is she alright?

AYU
I gave her some Panadol. She kept saying her head was hurting because of the tree. I think she’s pretty worked up about you cutting down the old gum tree.

DAVE
(defensive)
I know she’s upset about the tree, but it doesn’t give her the right to sabotage my work.

AYU
I’m worried about these headaches she keeps getting.

DAVE
I don’t know. You’ve been working so much lately. Maybe she’s just trying to get your attention.

AYU
You’re blaming me for Chloe’s behaviour?

DAVE
Well what do you reckon’s wrong with her?

AYU
I don’t know. Maybe it’s just hormones. And, well, she has been kind of anxious about Memek being on her own since Pop died.

Dave raises his eyebrows at her and holds her gaze for a moment. She looks back at him, unflinching, but neither say what they are really thinking.
DAVE
Well, I’m not taking her to work with me tomorrow.

AYU
(sighs)
I’ll take her over to Memek’s before work. Could you at least take Jack with you?

INT. NINI’S HOUSE. DAY

Nini and Chloe are sitting on the couch looking through an old book about Bali. Chloe stops on a photograph showing some girls her own age dancing.

CHLOE
Did you do this kind of dancing when you were little?

NINI
(laughing)
Everyone learn in the village, but I’m so terrible my mother let me stop.

CHLOE
Some of the kids are going to do dances.

NINI
(surprised)
You want to do dancing?

CHLOE
No.

She keeps turning pages then stops at a picture of a giant banyan tree wrapped in a black and white chequered cloth.

CHLOE
What is it?

NINI
Nah. This tree here, always in the temple. When I am little I think this is Naga Langit ... (pause) Dragon Tree. This one really beringin tree, but see,
how it look like dragon with long beard?

CHLOE
Sort of. What’s a Dragon Tree?

NINI
This is very special tree. It holds things together, holds the land together, everything together, stop everything sliding away. My father, your great grandfather, Chloe, say, we have to look after Dragon Tree, because Dragon Tree look after the earth. When he say that, I think of this beringin tree because in Bali people always look after it.

Chloe runs her fingers over the photograph, deep in thought.

INT. CHLOE’S ROOM / MUNDY HOME. NIGHT

Chloe stands by her open door listening to her parent’s arguing.

AYU
.... she could help us more if she wasn’t so far away.

DAVE
We don’t need help. This is just a temporary situation. I don’t want someone else around all the time, watching me, waiting for me to make a mistake.

AYU
You’re thinking about your family, Dave, not mine.

DAVE
She never thought I was good enough for you.
AYU
No. That’s not true. She was just scared of losing me. You’ve always kept her at a distance. Now we’re all she has left.

DAVE
Do you have to be so melodramatic?

Jack opens his own door and Chloe puts her finger to her lips to tell him to be quiet.

AYU
I won’t let you banish my family the way you have your own.

DAVE
And what’s that supposed to mean?

Jack is rubbing his eyes tearfully. Chloe beckons him into her room and shuts the door.

JACK
Are Mum and Dad gonna get divorced?

CHLOE
Shhhh.

She leads him over to her bed.

EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY

Chloe sits leaning against a small tree in the yard with a book in her lap. Her lips move as though she is mouthing the words to herself, but as we get close to her we hear the faint WHISPERING noise and see she is not looking at her book at all. Jack runs out of the house dressed like a pirate and climbs up into the big gum tree. As he does, the WHISPERING around Chloe is replaced by the WHINING noise. She closes her eyes against the impact then looks up from her book to see Jack swinging from a branch, below him, she sees a smoky shape, like a shadow, at the base of the tree. She stands up, looking disturbed.

CHLOE
Let go, Jack.
JACK
What for?

CHLOE
Because I said so. Dad said so.
It’s sick. It’ll break.

JACK
No it won’t.

He pulls harder, testing the branch.

JACK (CONT’D)
It’s a really strong one, it
won’t windsnap.

Chloe’s tone is warning, almost threatening.

CHLOE
You’re hurting the tree Jack.
You better stop.

She puts her hand out and the branch, which has been
bending under Jack’s weight, suddenly springs back up and
Jack falls to the ground. The WHINING lessens considerably.
It is not clear exactly what happened. Did Jack slip and
fall, causing the branch to spring back? Did the branch
spring back causing him to fall? Or did Chloe do something?
Chloe and Jack both seem to think she did. Jack, worried
and confused, looks from the tree to Chloe.

JACK
I’m sorry, Chloe.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD. DAY

Chloe is sitting under a tree in the schoolyard with a
book. All around her kids are running and screaming and
throwing balls. As we get closer to Chloe we hear the
WHISPERING noise. Again, Chloe is not looking at the book
in her lap. She seems to be mouthing something to herself
in time with the WHISPERING. Miss Hendon, Chloe’s teacher,
is on duty and she observes the following events from a
distance: A boy grabs onto a branch of the tree, swinging
his way under it to get a ball. He notices Chloe, and
swirls his finger by his ear, giving the ‘crazy’ signal to
a friend. Chloe doesn’t even notice him. Kate and Maya
approach and as they get closer Kate gives Maya a loaded
look.
KATE
Uh, what are you doing, Chloe?

Chloe looks blankly at her.

MAYA
Do you want to come and skip with us, Chloe?

Chloe has been distracted by a kid who has started climbing the tree she is leaning against and clearly hasn’t been listening properly.

CHLOE
I just have to... I just need to read this ...

KATE
BTW! (Be That Way)

She puts her arm through Maya’s and tugs her away.

KATE (CONT’D)
I told you she was weird. Let’s go ask Janet.

As the girls walk away, Miss Hendon takes a couple of steps towards Chloe, but stops and watches when Chloe closes her eyes and starts muttering again.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

Ayu has just come home. The kids are already in their pyjamas and the atmosphere is tense.

AYU
Did you have a good day, Chloe?

CHLOE
No.

AYU
Why, what happened?

CHLOE
Nothing.

Dave rolls his eyes and turns the page of the paper he is reading. Chloe glares at him. Jack opens his mouth then closes it again without speaking. Ayu gets up and starts clearing the plates and Chloe takes her own plate to the
sink and stands there absently. Dave doesn’t move to help
them and doesn’t seem to notice Chloe glaring at him.

AYU
Okay, Jack. Brush your teeth and
hop into bed. Can you read to
Jack for me tonight, Chloe?

CHLOE
I need to finish my homework.

AYU
(sighs)
Okay, in your room. I’ll be in
shortly, Jack. Off you go.

Chloe stalks out, and Jack dawdles away, glancing back
erursively at their parents. Ayu waits until they’re gone
before she speaks.

AYU
I had a call from aftercare
today. They said we haven’t paid
this month. (pause) I thought we
budgeted for that.

DAVE
Yeah, well, we didn’t budget for
the ute breaking down.

AYU
What? Why didn’t you tell me?

DAVE
Because I knew you’d ask your
mum for help.

Ayu is exasperated by what is clearly an old issue.

AYU
You know she’s happy to help out
if we need it. God, she’s
desperate to help us. Why is it
so hard for you to let her?

DAVE
It’s sorted. I’ll pay them
tomorrow.

He walks out of the room.
INT. HOSPITAL CAFE. DAY

Ayu is having lunch with her Doctor friend, Helen, who is about ten years older than Ayu.

HELEN
You look exhausted? They working you too hard here?

AYU
You can talk. Weren’t you on last night as well?

HELEN
I had a midnight page.

AYU
Do the kids mind when you’re so busy?

HELEN
Darling, at their age they’re barely home themselves. All they want from me is clean clothes and a well stocked pantry.

AYU
What about when they were younger?

HELEN
It did get pretty crazy at times, when Don and I were both doing shiftwork. But we had a nanny, and my folks helped out a lot. It was the only way we could manage it.

She looks hard at Ayu.

HELEN (CONT’D)
So it’s not work, its maternal guilt that’s making you look so tired.

AYU
Maybe. A bit. Chloe’s been acting... oddly, and Dave thinks it’s because I’m working too much.
HELEN
What do you think?

AYU
I’m not sure. She seems unhappy, and she’s been complaining of headaches. I wanted to ask you...

Helen’s pager goes off, she checks it then, standing up leans over and gives Ayu a peck on the cheek.

HELEN
I’m so sorry, I’m needed in emergency. We’ll talk soon, okay?

AYU
Sure.

EXT. MULLOWAY ROAD. LATE AFTERNOON

Chloe is on her own in the street, still in her uniform, making a tentative effort to try and ride Jack’s skateboard when Zina comes out of her house. She is wearing very new jeans and sneakers and a flowery blouse that belies her attempts to dress casually. The girls look at each other a little uncomfortably for a moment. Then Chloe picks up the skateboard and crosses the road to where Zina stands.

CHLOE
Hi Zina.

ZINA
Hi. (pause) You have done your project?

CHLOE
Not yet. I mean, I’ve nearly finished the presentation but I still haven’t worked out the performance bit. What about you?

Zina hasn’t followed much of Chloe’s rapid English.

ZINA
Please again?

CHLOE
(slowly)
Have you done your project?
ZINA
Oh yes, but I worry because my English not so good.

CHLOE
Don’t listen to Kate. She can be mean.

ZINA
Yes, I think she is not a very nice friend.

CHLOE
Do you want a turn?

She puts the skateboard down and nudges it towards Zina.

ZINA
Yes.

She gets straight on the board which immediately slips out from under her and she lands on her bum on the ground. Chloe looks worried but Zina bursts out laughing, and it is joyous and infectious. Chloe laughs too. Zina gets up and tries again.

EXT. MANSION GROUNDS. DAY

Dave is weeding flower beds when HAROLD, the middle aged man who owns the property, comes out of the house holding a yellow envelope. Dave gets up to greet him.

HAROLD
You’ve done a great job keeping this wilderness in order, Dave.

DAVE
It’s a pleasure, Harold.

HAROLD
I’m very sorry to have to tell you this ... we’re going to have to let you go.

DAVE
What?

HAROLD
We’ve been made an offer on the house and we’ve decided to take it. It’s time to downsize.
DAVE
I didn’t know you were selling.

HAROLD
Well, I had no idea how long it might take. It seems they fell in love with the garden. Of course, I’ll pay you for the rest of the month.

He hands the yellow envelope to Dave and pats him on the back awkwardly, then turns back to the house. Dave looks at the envelope and swears under his breath.

INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY

The kids are in their school uniforms having their afternoon tea when Ayu, in uniform, walks in with Nini. Dave gets up to walk out, but then turns back and speaks, a little awkwardly, but without sarcasm.

DAVE
Thanks, Ma. We really appreciate your help. Be good for Nini, kids!

Nini looks slightly surprised. Chloe rolls her eyes rudely. Dave hesitates then walks out the door without saying anything further or saying goodbye to Ayu. Memek notices but Ayu avoids her questioning look.

AYU
Thanks Mek. You’ve got my work number and my pager in case...

Nini opens the door for her and ushers her out, telling her not to fuss.

NINI

INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY

Jack is working on a lego project at the kitchen table. Nini is in the kitchen. There are pots steaming on the stove and various vegetables and spices chopped up around her. She is watching Chloe out of the kitchen window.
**EXT. MUNDY BACKYARD. DAY**

Chloe is moving around the garden, walking towards the big tree then stepping back, hand to head, then forward, turning away, then quickly back, as though trying to catch sight of something.

**INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY**

Nini observes her strange solitary dance for a moment, then opens the kitchen window and calls her to come and help.

*NINI*

*Mai nak, nulungin Nini malu.*

Chloe looks up, smiles and comes running towards the house.

**INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY**

Nini is cleaning up the kitchen. Something is simmering on the stove. Chloe and Jack are sitting at the table, snacking on kerupuk as they work. Chloe is putting the finishing touches on her maps. Jack is drawing his own map, something loosely based on Chloe’s work. Chloe finishes cutting out her map of Bali.

*Chloe*

*Am I part Balinese, Nini?*

*Nini*

*Napi?*

Nini has been attending to the stove and hasn’t heard her.

*CHLOE*

*Can I be Balinese when I’ve never been there? When I don’t even speak the language?*

*Nini*

*I come from Bali, and Ayu come from me, and you come from Ayu. So part of you comes from Bali too.*

*CHLOE*

*But which part?*

Nini looks her over carefully, as though considering her features one by one, then puts her hand over her solar plexus.
Chloe beams at her and puts her own hand over the place Nini has indicated. Jack looks up, his mouth stuffed with Krupuk.

**JACK**
What about me Nini?

Nini assesses him then puts her hand on her stomach.

**NINI**
You, I think this part.

They all laugh.

Chloe positions her map just above the map of Australia.

**Chloe**
Is this right, Nini? I know the size is wrong but is it in the right position?

Nini glances at the poster, and nods vaguely.

**NINI**
Is good. But you know, Bali not always sit up here. My Nini, your great great grandma, 'nik, tell me that in the ancient time Bali move all around the place.

**JACK**
Is that really true, Nini?

At that moment Dave walks in. Jack runs over and jumps on him.

**JACK**
Dad.

Chloe ignores him and concentrates carefully on gluing her map into place.

**INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING**

Dave is sitting at the table with a beer. The kitchen is spotless and the house tidier than we have seen it. Ayu comes in from the bathroom. She has changed out of her nurse’s uniform and wears a long flowing, cotton dress in
bright colours. Her hair is loose and she looks stunning, exotic, but Dave is too preoccupied to notice. She pours herself a glass of wine and sits down beside him.

DAVE
Miss Hendon called me today. She couldn’t reach you. She said Chloe’s been acting strangely at school.

Ayu looks dismayed.

DAVE
She wants us to come and see her on Friday afternoon.

AYU
Dave, I’m ...

DAVE
... working on Friday? Yeah, yeah, I figured.

AYU
(on the verge of tears)
Don’t you have your gardening job on Friday too. I’ll call and ask if we can change the time. I don’t want to lose the extra shifts, and we can’t afford ...

DAVE
Yeah, alright. I get it. But I’m not putting this off until you have a spare moment.

AYU
That is so unfair. Do you think I want to be working this much? I’m trying to support you.

DAVE
Right - while I indulge in the fantasy of running my own business.

AYU
I never said that. We knew it was going to be hard to start off with.
DAVE
It’s been two years and I’ve got less gardening work now than when I started?

AYU
Well, what do you want to do?

DAVE
Nothing. You go to work. I’ll go see Chloe’s teacher.

He takes his beer and walks out the back door. Ayu plonks down her glass and wine splashes out onto the table. She stares at it, enraged at Dave’s petulance, at the loss of what might have been a nice evening together, at the knowledge that whatever she says will only make Dave angrier.

EXT. MUNDY BACKYARD. DAY

Dave and PHIL, the council inspector, are standing by the tree talking. Phil is holding some of the yellow leaves in one hand and a clip board in the other.

PHIL
I’d say you’re spot on Dave. You usually are. But I’ll run these by the lab just to be sure.

DAVE
I’d be happy to be wrong in this case.

Phil looks up into the tree.

PHIL
Yeah, she’s a beauty.

DAVE
Yeah. (pause) Things still busy your end?

PHIL
Same old, same old. It’ll be interesting to see how they do things up north.

DAVE
You going on holidays?
PHIL
I’ve taken a job in Brisbane. My wife’s parents are getting on and she’s keen for us to go back and take care of them.

DAVE
Who’s taking over from you?

PHIL
Why? Are you interested in coming back?

DAVE
I don’t know. Maybe.

PHIL
They’d be happy to have you. Why don’t you give Bob a ring. I don’t think they’ve even advertised it yet.

Dave signs a form on the clipboard.

PHIL
You said there was another matter?

DAVE
Oh, no. No. That’s it for now.

The men shake hands and the inspector leaves. Dave turns to see Chloe has been watching them from the back deck.

CHLOE
Can he make it better?

DAVE
I told you Chloe, I’m going to have to cut it down. It just has to go through council first.

CHLOE
(softly)
No.

She walks past him and sits down on the ground a couple of metres from the tree. Dave watches her, concern etched on his face.
EXT. SCHOOLYARD. DAY

Jack is playing basketball with a couple of older BOYS in the near empty schoolyard. Chloe is leaning against a tree nearby. Her lips are moving but although she is holding a book she hasn’t bothered opening it and appears to be talking to herself.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

DAVE and Miss Hendon, are in the classroom. Miss Hendon is looking out the window into the playground.

MISS HENDON
She just sits there on her own all lunchtime.

She turns from the window and sits down opposite Dave.

MISS HENDON (CONT’D)
Is there anything going on at home we should know about?

DAVE
No, I mean, her mum’s been working a lot lately but, well, I guess we don’t really know what’s going on. She used to have lots of friends.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD. DAY

One of the basketball boys is climbing the tree behind Chloe. He pulls an army knife out of his pocket and starts carving his name into the branch he is sitting on. As he makes the first cut the WHISPERING changes to WHINING. Chloe’s eyes close against the impact and it is as though she feels the cut herself. She looks up and sees what the boy is doing, and glimpses a smoky shape merging back into the base of the tree. She springs to her feet.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE. DAY

MISS HENDON
If it was just the daydreaming I wouldn’t be so concerned. But she can be a little... unpredictable at times.
DAVE
Unpredictable. Yes! Flies off the handle at the slightest thing. She’s been acting really...

He breaks off, unable to say the word, and puts his head in his hands for a moment.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD. DAY

CHLOE
What are you doing?

The boy ignores her and keeps carving letters into the tree. The WHINING is intensifying. Chloe periodically twitches against the impact and this makes her look quite deranged.

CHLOE (CONT’D)
Stop it. Don’t do that. Why are you doing that?

The boy gives her a scornful look and keeps on with his carving. Jack and the other boy have noticed Chloe’s growing distress and are walking towards her. Jack looks worried. Chloe starts shouting, she is apoplectic.

CHLOE (CONT’D)
You shouldn’t do that. You’re hurting it. You’re not supposed to have knives at school.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE. DAY

MISS HENDON
I’d like your permission to set up a meeting with the school counsellor. It can be a difficult age for girls and sometimes it can help to talk to someone outside the family.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD. DAY

Chloe reaches her hand towards the boy, as though she means to try and grab the knife out of his hand. Suddenly, the boy falls to the ground and starts screaming in agony. His arm lies at a strange angle.
Dave and Miss Hendon come running out of the building. Chloe is leaning against the tree. She is pale, shaky and muttering to herself. The WHINING has returned to intense WHISPERING. Jack and the other boy watching hear nothing, but look scared.

**INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING**

Dave is sitting at the kitchen table with his books in front of him but he is not working and he looks extremely stressed. Chloe and Jack are sitting in front of the TV. Jack looks nervous. Chloe leans towards him.

CHLOE
(whispering)
I made him stop hurting it, Jack. I stopped him just like I stopped you.

Ayu rushes in looking very worried. Jack runs and throws his arms around her. Chloe keeps looking at the TV.

AYU
What is it? What happened?

JACK
(Cautious)
Gary Knight reckons Chloe pushed him out of a tree.

CHLOE
I didn’t touch him.

AYU
What happened?

CHLOE
It was his own fault. He was hurting the tree. Leave me alone.

She gets up and walks out of the room and Ayu and Dave exchange concerned looks.

**INT. COUNSELLOR’S OFFICE. DAY**

Chloe sits fiddling with the key on the chain around her neck. She won’t meet the counsellor’s eyes and answers her questions evasively.
COUNSELLOR
So your Mum’s been working a lot lately.

Chloe sits in silence.

COUNSELLOR (CONT’D)
How do you feel about that?

CHLOE
Okay. They have to pay the mortgage. There’s an economic crisis on, you know.

COUNSELLOR
What do you do while she’s at work?

Chloe speaks in a bored monotone.

CHLOE
Homework, play with my brother, hang out, draw.

COUNSELLOR
So you like drawing?

CHLOE
Yeah. Art’s my favourite subject.

COUNSELLOR
Do you think you could draw me a picture of how you’re feeling at the moment.

Chloe responds to the counsellor’s obvious tactics with fake enthusiasm.

CHLOE
Sure!

She takes the proffered paper, bends over it with pencil in hand, sketches quickly, then hands her picture over. It is of a cartoony girl smiling widely with a beaming sun behind her. The counsellor guards her response.

COUNSELLOR
Who are your friends at school, Chloe?
Chloe sits up straight, looks her in the eye and responds perkily.

CHLOE
Kate, Maya, Amy, lots of other girls in my class.

COUNSELLOR
And do you do things with these girls outside of school as well?

CHLOE
Sure, we have play dates, sleepovers, makeover parties, do each other’s hair, practise our dance routines, that kind of thing.

The counsellor looks up at the raggedly dressed tomboy before her and back down at her notes.

EXT. MAIN STREET SHOPS. DAY

Ayu and Chloe walk along the street together. They both hold plastic bags full of food. Chloe looks happy to be with her mum. Ayu looks really tired but is making an effort. They swing hands and smile at each other as they walk. An older Balinese woman is walking towards them. She stops and greets Ayu warmly in Balinese and they exchange small talk.

WOMAN
Ken ken kabare, Dik 'Yu?

AYU
Luwung, Mek.

WOMAN
Memekne seger?

AYU
Seger, Mek. Memek ken ken?

WOMAN
Luwung masih. Panake suba gede.

She smiles at Chloe who looks down shyly.

AYU
Nggih.
The woman walks away.

CHLOE
Who was that?

AYU
An old friend of Nini’s.

CHLOE
Why don’t you have any Balinese friends?

AYU
Nini had a couple, but they lived far away so we didn’t see them much. None of them had kids my age.

CHLOE
How come you never speak Balinese to us?

AYU
I’m not very fluent. I’ve forgotten a lot.

They walk in silence for a moment.

CHLOE
Mum, did Nini used to tell you stories about Bali?

AYU
I told you she used to tell me about growing up in the village.

CHLOE
No, I mean stories from ... about the ancient times?

AYU
I don’t remember any. I was bought up on Bible stories. We used to go to church every week.
CHLOE
Is Nini still a Christian?

AYU
I don’t know. She and Pop stopped going to church when I grew up. I think we just went because it was important to Pop’s family. I never saw Nini pray like before we went to Bali. That’s just how they do things there.

CHLOE
She told me it’s how you look after the spirits of the dead.

She glances at Ayu who doesn’t say anything.

CHLOE
I...(hesitates), I like Nini’s stories.

AYU
I know you do. But remember Chloe, they’re just stories.

Chloe stays silent and doesn’t meet her mum’s eye.

INT. MUNDY HOME. NIGHT

DAVE
What did she say?

AYU
She said it was okay, but she doesn’t want to go back.

DAVE
I meant the counsellor.

AYU
Oh. Well, she said Chloe wasn’t very forthcoming, and it could be a while before she trusts her enough to really open up. She wants to see her twice a week. (pause) And she wants us to take her for a psychiatric assessment.
DAVE
(pales)
She thinks she’s going crazy?

AYU
No! No, of course not. But something’s disturbing Chloe, causing her to act so, well, you know how she’s been, and the headaches. It might just be stress, but...

Ayu’s voice is breaking as she faces up to the horrible thought of what they are facing.

AYU
... we have to consider other possibilities.

DAVE
Jesus, Ayu.

AYU
I’ve set up an appointment with the paediatric psychiatrist at work. And... I’ve told matron I can’t take on any more extra shifts.

They are both sober at the thought of what this means.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Again Chloe is seated in an office, this time with the Child Psychiatrist, who seems to have got further with Chloe than the Counsellor did.

CHLOE
Do you think there is something wrong with me?

PSYCHIATRIST
I really don’t know anything about you yet, Chloe. Your parents and your teachers say you seem to be having some problems, and they want to see if there’s anything I can do to help you.

Chloe looks doubtful.
PSYCHIATRIST
I can only help you if you want me to, Chloe. If you don’t tell me what’s wrong, then it will be hard for me to help you. It’s up to you.

They sit in silence for a moment and the Psychiatrist seems totally relaxed about that.

CHLOE
Sometimes I hear things.

The psychiatrist nods but doesn’t prompt her.

CHLOE (CONT’D)
Like strange sort of noises that no one else can hear. They make my head feel funny... and ... sometimes they hurt me.

The psychiatrist continues listening, attentive, but not doing anything.

CHLOE (CONT’D)
I hear them all the time and I ... sometimes I think I ...

The Psychiatrist waits until it is clear Chloe isn’t going to continue.

PSYCHIATRIST
Where do the noises come from, Chloe?

Chloe opens her mouth as though she is going to speak then closes it again and shrugs.

PSYCHIATRIST
Do you want me to help you?

Chloe gives a little nod.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Ayu and Dave are now sitting with the Psychiatrist in her office.
PSYCHIATRIST
I want her to have an electrocardiograph and a CT scan and I want to do them today. We need to rule out the possibility of any kind of growth in the brain (at this Dave reaches for Ayu’s hand). I should tell you that the type of auditory hallucinations Chloe has been experiencing can be associated with adolescent onset schizophrenia.

Ayu bursts into tears and Dave, who looks stunned, puts his arm around her.

PSYCHIATRIST
I understand that’s a frightening prospect. However, Chloe shows no indications of any kind of psychosis and it is not uncommon for children to experience transitory auditory hallucinations as a result of stress or trauma.

AYU
Hallucinations!

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Chloe sits, stoic, in a chair in a small room, electromagnodes attached to her head and body, while she is subjected to a series of tests that require her to open and shut her eyes as lights are flashed on and off, according to the instructions of the doctor operating the machine. Dave and Ayu stand in the background, holding hands. All three look frightened.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Chloe is lying inside the CT scanner, which beeps and bellows at horrifying frequencies. Ayu and Dave sit beside her, Ayu holding onto her leg for comfort.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

The family are sitting together in front of the television watching a movie and eating popcorn. They are all very subdued.
INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

Dave tucks Chloe into bed and sits awkwardly by her for a moment.

DAVE
That was some day, wasn’t it?

Chloe gives a little smile.

DAVE (CONT’D)
You know if there’s anything worrying you, you can talk to Mum and me about it, don’t you, Chloe.

Chloe smiles again.

CHLOE
Ok, Daddy.

Dave is a little surprised by her sweet response but can’t think of anything else to say. He sits there a moment longer, then gets up and kisses her on the forehead.

DAVE
Good night, Honey.

CHLOE
Night, Daddy.

EXT. PARKLANDS. DAY

It is a beautiful sunny day. Dave and Ayu sit together talking on a picnic rug in a lovely park. They seem closer than we have seen them before. Chloe and Jack are running around on the grass amongst a grove of trees. Other families are picnicking nearby.

Chloe points up to a natural platform amongst the branches of a big old Morton Bay Fig tree.

CHLOE
Let’s make a cubby up there.

Jack runs to the tree but has trouble trying to reach the lowest branch.

JACK
I can’t get up.
Here you go.

She makes her arms into a footrest for him and boosts him up. Dave and Ayu watch them from their rug.

Maybe she’s been under stress at school or something.

At least nothing showed up in the tests.

She’s just a kid.

He takes her hand and they look up to where the kids sit happily in the tree. The kids notice them looking and wave down to them.

INT. CHLOE’S ROOM. NIGHT

Chloe is lying in her pyjamas amidst the chaos of her room drawing the park. As she draws, we slide back into an animated version of her day at the park, only this time, as she and Jack run around the trees, we hear incoherent WHISPERING. The sound has the rhythm and flow of many voices talking animatedly at once in a foreign language. As the children run and play, smoky shadowy shapes slip and slide out of the bases of the trees, they are almost seen, almost people shaped beings, male and female, old and young, tall and short, the tree spirits embodied. As Chloe watches, trying to catch their forms, they seem to be watching back. The children shimmy up the tree and wave down to their parents sitting on the grass. The adults look sad, but the children are brightly happy. As we move closer to Chloe we hear how she is surrounded, embraced by the voices of the tree sprits.

There is a brief tap and Ayu walks in the door. She looks down at Chloe’s drawing, a simple scene of the parkland, Mum and Dad sitting on the rug. Chloe smiles up at her.

INT. MUNDY HOME. NIGHT

Dave sits at the kitchen table alone, book work spread around him, scribbling down figures. Finally he puts down his pen, pulls out the yellow envelope from a bag and flicks through the wad of cash inside it. Ayu walks into the room and he shoves the envelope back into his bag.
EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY. DAY

Chloe sits alone in the hallway on a bench outside two marked Counsellor and Sick Bay. A couple of kids walk past, whisper to each other, then turn back and stare at Chloe. Chloe makes a face at them. Then Zina comes down the hallway carrying a pile of books. She stops to talk to Chloe.

    ZINA
    Hi.

Chloe doesn’t meet her eyes.

    CHLOE
    Hi.

    ZINA
    Are you sick?

    CHLOE
    Maybe. I might be crazy even. Haven’t you heard what people are saying about me?

She glares at Zina, but Zina is unruffled.

    ZINA
    Well, you know I not speak so good English, so if you crazy that is okay.

Chloe can’t help laughing at the mixed up logic of Zina’s response and clearly feels better for it. The counsellor opens her door and Chloe rolls her eyes and stands up.

    ZINA
    Goodbye.

    CHLOE
    See ya.

EXT. MICK’S YARD. DAY

Dave is knocking on Mick’s door to no response. The magnolia tree is in full bloom behind him. He knocks again and then takes the yellow envelope out of his pocket and looks at the letter box in the door. He turns the envelope over then puts it back in his pocket and walks away.
INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

A Russian boy finishes playing a traditional song on a Balalaika. His presentation, featuring a map, a flag, and some other Russian symbols, is displayed in the background. He bows to the applause of the class, then sits down.

MISS HENDON
Next up we have Zina.

Zina comes to the front of the classroom. She is immaculate in her brand new uniform and stands out amongst the rest of the scruffy, partly uniformed public school kids. It makes her hard to read. Nobody knows what to expect of her. Her presentation is beautifully laid out and she speaks with well rehearsed care.

ZINA
My father and my mother come from Iran. This is my country, and this my flag. This is national emblem. Iran is the eighteenth largest country in the world. We speak mostly Persia, and we famous for Persia carpet. Also we have this very nice animal call the lynx. This I learn from Wikipedia, but I never see this lynx in my city of Tehran.

A couple of kids laugh, as Zina’s sense of humour seeps through her awkwardness with the language. Now I will sing Persia song.

Kate opens her eyes wide at Maya in a ‘get a load of this’ manner. Then Zina begins to sing and her voice is so clear and beautiful, and the song so melancholy that the whole class is moved even though no one can understand what she is singing about. When she finishes Chloe is the first to start clapping.

MISS HENDON
That was beautiful Zina. Is that a traditional Iranian song?

ZINA
Is number one hit on chart last year.
Some of the kids in the class laugh. She is making an impression.

**EXT. SCHOOLYARD. DAY**

Chloe walks past Kate and Maya without a glance and goes to sit with Zina.

    CHLOE
    You were so good.

    ZINA
    Thank you.

    CHLOE
    My grandma comes from Bali, but I don’t speak the language or anything.

Zina offers Chloe something delicious from her lunchbox, and Chloe takes it.

    ZINA
    And you crazy.

    CHLOE
    (laughing)
    Seriously, I have no idea what I’m going to do.

Zina weighs her words carefully.

    ZINA
    Just do what is your best thing, Chloe. This is what I do.

    CHLOE
    (wondering)
    My best thing.

**INT. HOSPITAL. DAY**

Ayu is striding along the hospital corridor when she sees her doctor friend, Helen, walking out of a room, looking sober. She hastens towards her and they meet at the doorway.

    HELEN
    Bertha passed away this morning.
AYU
Oh, no. I didn’t think...

HELEN
I know you were fond of her. We all were.

Helen gives Ayu a brief hug then goes on her way. Ayu walks into the room where Bertha is laid out peacefully. She looks to be asleep. Beside her is the photo of her children and grandchildren. Ayu picks it up a moment, then replaces it and draws the curtain around Bertha’s bed.

EXT. MUNDY YARD. DAY

Chloe and Jack cycle into their yard to find Dave standing by the door of the ute waiting for them. They are wearing their schools uniforms.

CHLOE
Where’s Mum?

DAVE
She got held up. You’ll have to come to work with me for a bit.

CHLOE
No. Can’t I stay here?

DAVE
No fuss, Chloe. You can sit in the car and do your homework. It won’t take long.

EXT. CLIENT’S YARD. DAY

Dave is setting up some equipment in a client’s yard. The light is starting to fade. Jack is sitting in the ute fiddling with the radio. Chloe has left the car and is walking towards the tree that Dave is about to cut back. It has a long thick branch hanging low over the pathway to the front door of the house. As she gets closer she hears intense WHISPERING. She looks up into the branches of the tree and it the tree seems alive with movement. When she looks down she catches a glimpse of a smoky, indistinct figure beside her and then it is gone.

CHLOE
(anguished)
I feel sick.
Dave is trying to keep his patience with her.

DAVE
I told you to wait in the car, Chloe.

CHLOE
Please, Daddy. We have to go now.

DAVE
I just have to take off this one branch. I can’t leave it right over the pathway like this. Mrs Yin almost knocked herself unconscious this morning.

He takes out his saw, the WHISPERING changes to WHINING as the saw cuts into the branch and the noise continues to intensify. Chloe screws up her eyes as though she is in pain. When she opens them she looks wild, not herself.

CHLOE
Stop it!

Dave looks up at her. As he does, she touches the trunk near the end of the branch and the saw unaccountably slips out of the cut he has made in the tree.

DAVE
Damn it!

Blood runs from a deep gash in his hand. The WHINING reverts to WHISPERING again. Chloe is pale, she sounds horrified.

CHLOE
Look what you did.

She is looking not at Dave, who is bleeding profusely, but at the branch where white sap oozes from the cut he has made. Then she sinks to the ground in a faint. Jack stands watching from the gate. He looks frightened.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM. EARLY EVENING

Ayu and Dave sit together at the kitchen table. They both look extremely tense. Dave’s hand is bandaged up.
DAVE
I told you I couldn’t take her to work with me. I won’t take her again.

AYU
I can’t take her all the way to Memek’s every time we both have to work. Do you think I should take some time off?

DAVE
I think she did it on purpose.

AYU
No! Don’t say that. I’m sure it was an accident. (pause) She said she can’t really remember what happened.

DAVE
Where is she now?

AYU
Still outside.

They both get up and look out the kitchen window.

EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. EVENING

Chloe is in the dark, windy yard on her own. She is pacing around the gum tree and seems to be talking to herself. She looks crazed.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

DAVE
It’s that bloody tree. As soon as the permit comes through I’m taking it down.

INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY

The room is dark except for the table where Chloe sits alone working on her drawings. She is drawing the tree in the backyard. Her drawing has noticeably improved. It has become more detailed, more original, more confident. As she draws the picture animates, the tree becomes a dragon that rises up, flailing around as though under the force of a wild wind, shaking off fragments of bark and leaves and
branches as it tosses its head, moaning and roaring as though in pain.

**INT. NINI’S HOME. DAY**

Ayu, in nurse’s uniform, stands at the door talking to Nini. Chloe sits on the couch with the Bali book pretending not to listen.

**NINI**

*Ada napi, 'Yu?*

**AYU**

I told you Chloe hasn’t been feeling well. I thought it would be nice for her to spend the day with you.

Nini looks at her daughter as though she knows far more than she is telling her.

**NINI**

You work too much, Yu. If you let me give you money you don’t have to work so much?

**AYU**

*Eh, de Mek! You need to hold onto your savings now Dad’s gone.*

Nini is genuinely perplexed.

**NINI**

For what?

**AYU**

We’re okay, Mek. You can help by watching Chloe for me again.

She walks back over to kiss Chloe goodbye and leaves. Memek calls Chloe to the kitchen.

**MEMEK**

*Mai 'nik.*
INT. NINI’S KITCHEN. DAY

Nini is preparing food and keeping up a running commentary in Balinese, naming things and sometimes translating her instructions as she passes things to Chloe to chop or grind. It is not clear how much Chloe understands, but she occasionally repeats a word or phrase softly to herself.

EXT. COURTYARD. DAY

Nini goes out to a large pot of lemon grass in the little courtyard just outside the kitchen. Chloe follows her out. As she is about to cut a thick stalk of lemon grass from the pot, Nini addresses the plant.

NINI

Nunas.

CHLOE

What? What did you say, Nini?

NINI

Nunas.

She thinks a moment.

NINI (CONT’D)

Your great grandfather, Chloe, he teach me we must ask first the plant to cut some off. Then is okay to take it. That is tattwa.

She walks back inside, Chloe wide eyed looks back at the plant, then follows her grandmother inside.

INT. MUNDY HOME. EVENING

Dave and Ayu are talking in the kitchen. The kids are sitting on the couch together in the background.

DAVE

He’s been such a great little helper this afternoon, really pitching in. Weren’t you, buddy.

He looks over but Jack hasn’t heard him. He is listening intently to Chloe and looking worried.
CHLOE
... and all the plants have spirits. They are alive just like we are. That’s why we have to look after them. We should only cut them down if we really, really have to, or like if we need to use them for something important like food or medicine.

DAVE
What are you telling him?

CHLOE
It’s true. Nini told me.

JACK
What’s a spirit? Is it a ghost?

Chloe is aglow with her discovery.

CHLOE
It’s what makes things alive.

JACK
I don’t want to come to work with you any more, Dad. The spirits might get me if we hurt the trees.

DAVE
It’s alright Jack. We’re not hurting anything and trees don’t have feelings. Chloe’s just been listening to some of Nini’s fairy tales.

CHLOE
It is true. I known it’s true. You never believe anything I say just like you never believe Nini. She’s my grandma. She wouldn’t lie to me.

Chloe runs off to her room and we hear her door SLAM.
INT. LOUNGE ROOM. EVENING.

Chloe sits working on something crafty at the kitchen table. She is cutting things out of magazines and sticking them onto a big piece of cardboard. Dave watches her for a moment from the other side of the room before getting up and going to sit at the opposite end of the table.

DAVE
I haven’t seen Kate around for a while. Are you two still friends?

Chloe doesn’t answer. She is concentrating intently on pasting tiny bits of paper onto the cardboard.

DAVE (CONT’D)
Has something happened at school?

CHLOE
No.

DAVE
I know you’re sad about the gum tree, Chlo’, but I’m only doing what I have to do. It’s really dangerous. If a branch snaps off it could fall on the house, or the garage. You or Jack could get hurt.

Chloe keeps pasting and doesn’t look up.

DAVE
You shouldn’t tell Jack those stories of Nini’s. You’re scaring him. He thinks they’re real.

Chloe keeps pasting. Dave seems to be searching for something else to say. He is as frustrated with Chloe as he is worried about her and he wants to do the right thing.

DAVE
What are you making there?

CHLOE
A collage.
DAVE
Right. It looks fabulous.
What’s it about?

Chloe looks directly at her father for the first time.

CHLOE
It’s about what happens when you
kill trees.

She lifts up the poster and turns it around so Dave can see it. She has created an intricate and strangely sinister piece of art by layering tiny bits of shiny green and brown magazine paper over and over each other to create a forest rich in depth and texture. The trees have long, limb like branches and she has stuck thin streamers of shiny red paper to the trees. It looks like the jungle and the picture itself are spattered with blood. It is the first piece of art she has done that is almost as visually rich and alive as the animations of what she imagined while she was drawing. Chloe watches Dave for his reaction. Although he is disturbed by the image, he tries to keep his voice neutral.

DAVE
And this is something you’re
doing for school?

CHLOE
(shrugging)
It’s for art. She said we could
do whatever we want.

EXT. MICK’S HOME. DAY

Dave gets out of his ute and walks up the front path. There are magazines and advertising brochures scattered on the pathway and in front of the door. He takes the yellow envelope out of his pocket and knocks at the door. No one answers. He walks over to the tree and has a good look at it. He runs his fingers slowly over its branches, then down the trunk to where it meets the soil. The tree appears to be very healthy.

INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY

Dave sits in front of the computer filling out an online job application. He has the careers section of the paper beside him and a council job vacancy is circled in red.
INT. MUNDY HOME. NIGHT

Chloe has been drawing at the kitchen table and is surrounded by bits of paper and art materials. She starts to gather pages of her artwork together into a booklet. Ayu is watching television in the background as she does the ironing.

AYU
It’s late, Chloe. Go to bed.

CHLOE
In a minute. I’ve nearly finished.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

Kate and Maya perform the last segment of their Bollywood dance routine. They look fantastic and Maya is a really good dancer. Together they are cool and popular enough that it doesn’t matter that Kate can’t dance and keeps giggling. Most of the class applaud enthusiastically. Zina rolls her eyes discreetly at Chloe.

EXT. MICK’S YARD. DAY

Dave gets out of his ute. Beside the magnolia tree is a large For Sale sign. Dave stands, baffled, yellow envelope in hand. Tucker walks out of his front door and approaches him.

TUCKER
Disappeared sometime last week. Next thing I know, there are cops all over the place. Turns out he was caught up in some car racket. Had to put the place up for sale to pay his legal costs.

He is relishing passing on this news.

TUCKER(CONT’D)
Neighbourhood just won’t be the same without him.

Dave looks at the yellow envelope, then puts it back in his pocket, laughing with relief.
INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

Chloe stands before the class. She is dressed more neatly than usual and holds up her presentation, a large map of Australia with a slightly smaller map of Bali positioned above it. The borders are decorated with Australian and Indonesian flags, coat of arms, pictures of dancers and animals and scenery from both countries. Rumours have spread about Chloe and a couple of kids in the class nudge each other and whisper about her.

CHLOE
Both my parents are Australian.
But my mum’s mum comes from Bali
so I am part Balinese.

She reads nervously straight from the information on her presentation without looking up.

CHLOE (CONT’D)
The island of Bali is part of Indonesia. Most Balinese are Hindu. Bali is famous for its temples, its traditional dancing and gamelan music. It is a popular tourist destination well known for its beautiful beaches.

Chloe looks up to see Kate giving a fake yawn, but behind her Zina is smiling encouragingly. Chloe unsticks the island of Bali from her presentation and starts to talk directly to her audience.

CHLOE (CONT’D)
But in ancient times, Bali wasn’t like it is now. It used to move all around the place.

She sticks the map of Bali back down not far from Sydney. Then she props up her presentation and picks up the booklet of drawings she has put together. They are in the style of traditional Balinese paintings, like the animation we saw when Nini told Chloe the story of the dragons forming Bali. As Chloe tells her story, she turns the pages and the class see the images come to life.

CHLOE (CONT’D)
It floated wherever it was carried by the ocean currents and the tides and the winds.
In those days, Bali was called the Island of the Gods, because the gods loved to come down to visit and ride around on the island like a boat.

But the Balinese people didn’t like the way their island was always moving around because they never knew where they were going to wake up.

They begged the great ancestor, Kaki Tua, to help them. Kaki Tua was really a god with amazing powers and the ruler of snakes and dragons. He wanted to help his people, so he called up one thousand serpents and ordered them to hold Bali in place.

The serpents wound themselves around and around the island, then they dived down to the bottom of the sea, and anchored it in place.

The people of Bali were happy and grateful, but the gods didn’t think it was fair to leave the serpents down in the sea like that. They told Kaki Tua to attach the island to the bottom of the sea permanently and send the serpents home.

But after Kaki Tua did that, the gods didn’t want to come and visit Bali anymore. They preferred it when it was sailing around like a boat. They told Kaki Tua that if the people of Bali wanted them to come and visit, they would have to build temples and call them from there. That’s why there are so many temples in Bali.

The class respond enthusiastically and Chloe quickly goes and sits back down next to Zina.
INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY

Dave walks in as Ayu is getting ready to leave for work. She is surprised to see him, and even more surprised when he embraces her and swings her around.

DAVE
I’m sorry.

AYU
Okaaay.

DAVE
It’s going to be okay. I promise. I’ve applied for a job with council. I’m a good arborist, and I’m pretty sure they’ll have me back.

AYU
But you hated being an arborist. You were miserable there.

DAVE
Yeah, but most of what I do now is arborist work anyway. At least with council I got a regular pay check.

AYU
(doubtful)
If you’re sure.

DAVE
And Ayu, the permit’s come through and I’m going to start work on the gumtree this weekend.

AYU
Can’t you wait a bit longer? Chloe’s so fragile at the moment.

DAVE
I don’t want to prolong this. The tree’s sick, there’s no saving it and it’s dangerous. Once it’s gone she’ll stop fretting about it and she’ll be fine again.
AYU
Do you really think so?

DAVE
For god sakes, Ayu, it’s just a tree.

AYU
Not to Chloe.

DAVE
So you’re saying you believe all those stories of Nini’s about spirits too?

AYU
It doesn’t matter what I believe, or what Nini believes. This is about what Chloe believes.

They face each other, their recent truce seems tenuous.

EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY.

It is very windy but Chloe sits leaning against one of the smaller trees in the yard. Dave and Jack are playing a half-hearted game of soccer. Both of them keep glancing over at Chloe, but she is doing nothing unusual. Ayu walks out the back door in her uniform.

AYU
Hey kids. I got an early mark. How was your presentation, Chloe?

Chloe smiles at her but doesn’t answer. Dave and Ayu exchange a look.

DAVE
I’m going to start cutting down the gum tree down first thing tomorrow. The weather report says the wind’s really going to pick up over the weekend.

CHLOE
No.
AYU
Daddy and I are so sorry honey. We know you really love that tree.

Chloe rises, she is beside herself.

CHLOE
But there’s something wrong with it. We have to help it. You can’t kill it.

DAVE
I know you’re upset, I don’t like it either, but it’s dangerous. Someone could get hurt.

Chloe looks really disturbed. She is not even focusing on Dave as she speaks.

CHLOE
I have to stop you.

Ayu goes over, puts her arm around her and gently leads her into the house, talking softly to her as they walk.

Dave and Jack follow them into the house.

EXT. MUNDY HOME. DAY

Nini gets out of a taxi in the driveway and Chloe runs to her, still distraught. Nini asks her what’s wrong in Balinese.

NINI
Ada napi, nak?

CHLOE
Sing ada napi.

NINI
De keto ‘nik. Ada napi?

Seeing the gentle concern in her grandmother’s face, Chloe throws her arms around her and starts sobbing.

CHLOE
Nini, I can hear the tree spirits.
She looks up to gauge her reaction before going on, but Nini seems unsurprised.

CHLOE
I hear them all the time. They talk to me.

Nini is nodding, looking directly at her, taking her seriously, affirming what she says, as though she believes her, as though it makes sense.

NINI
Yes. You can hear them. What these spirit say, 'nik?

Chloe is sobbing with the relief of finally being able to tell someone.

CHLOE
I don’t know. I’ve tried and tried to understand them but I can’t. (pause) Sometimes I think they’re crying. Everyone thinks I’m crazy but I’m not. I’m not. I have to stop Dad from cutting down my tree.

NINI
Your dad say this tree very sick. Is true?

CHLOE
Yes, but Nini, we have to look after it. What if it’s the Dragon Tree?

Nini is shaking her head, and chuckling a little.

NINI
No. No. Sing keto. Is not like that. This is gum tree. This is sick gum tree. Dragon Tree not beringin tree, not gum tree. Dragon Tree is Naga Langit. We can’t see that Dragon Tree. My father tell me the Gods hide it to keep it safe.

CHLOE
But how can we look after something we can’t even see?
Nini sits down on the ground near the tree and Chloe sits down beside her.

NINI
My father, your great
grandfather, Chloe, he always
tell me, this big world (she
gestures around her) just the
same as this little world inside
us (she puts her hands on her
body). Everything out here just
the same as in here.

In big world we have mountains
and oceans, and lakes and
streams, we have animals and
plants. We have trees. Inside,
in this little world, everything
is the same.

As Nini speaks, Chloe looks down and we segue into an animation showing us the world insider her as she imagines it - a world of trees and lakes and mountains and rivers in place of organs and bones and muscles and blood vessels.

NINI
You try too hard to understand
this big world. You need to
listen to this one, this little
world here.

She puts her hand firmly on Chloe’s chest.

NINI
Where is Naga Langit in here?
You need to look after this one
first.

Chloe puts her hand on her chest, still uncertain, feeling
for meaning within herself.

INT. MUNDY HOME. DAY

Dave and Ayu stand together at the window, watching Chloe
and Memek in the garden, great concern etched into their
faces. Dave puts his arm around Ayu.

DAVE
She really listens to Memek,
doesn’t she?
EXT. MUNDY YARD. EVENING

Chloe is kneeling in front of the tree in the wild winds. At the foot of the tree is an offering she has made. It is similar to the one she saw on the shrine at Nini’s. Her eyes are open and tears stream down her face. She raises her hands to her forehead in Balinese prayer position.

EXT. DAVE’S BACKYARD. EARLY MORNING

The sun is only just rising. Gale force winds wreak havoc in the back yard. Toys tumble across the garden, the gum tree is swaying and creaking dangerously. Dave’s ute full of equipment is parked half way in the garage, its rear protruding.

INT. BACKDOOR. DAY

Dave and Ayu are standing just inside the open back door. They appear to be arguing but it is too noisy to make out what they are saying at first. The screen door is BANGING in the wind and Jack is YELLING in the background. Chloe watches impassively. The whole family are still in their pyjamas. We move closer to Ayu and Dave.

AYU
Please Dave, don’t go out there.

She grabs hold of his arm.

DAVE
I’ve got to move the ute, Ayu.

He pulls away from her, opens the door and heads outside into the wild wind, shutting the door behind him. Jack is upset and crying and Ayu turns away from the door and goes to comfort him. She doesn’t notice Chloe slip out the door after Dave but Jack does.

AYU
It’s okay. He’s just moving the ute. He’ll be straight back.

JACK
(still sobbing)
They shouldn’t go out there.

AYU
What? Jack, where’s Chloe?
She looks behind her and sees the door ajar. She jumps to her feet and runs to the door.

AYU (CONT’D)
(shouting)
Chloe!

**EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY**

Chloe stands in the windy garden. She is pale, her eyes wild. She watches Dave walking towards the ute and then looks up at the tree. She puts her hand to her chest and we see an animated flash of a dragon rising within her, the dragon opens its mouth to let out an almighty roar, but what we hear is Chloe screaming, and what we see is Dave stopping in his tracks as he turns towards her.

**INT/EXT. MUNDY HOME/YARD. DAY**

Just as Ayu reaches the door there is an almighty CRASHING noise. She flings open the door and we see that the tree has fallen across the garage, crushing its roof and the front of the ute along with it.

AYU (CONT’D)
No...

**EXT/INT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY**

Before we have a chance to take in what has happened, Dave walks into view. He is carrying Chloe who is deathly white and still. He pushes past Ayu and walks into the house where he lays her on the couch. Ayu rushes over and starts checking her pulse.

AYU
What happened?

Dave is watching Chloe intently. She opens her eyes and smiles right into his.

CHLOE
It’s alright now, Daddy. It’s not hurting anymore.

He holds her gaze a moment then looks at Ayu, something just dawning on him.

DAVE
She stopped me. She saved me.
EXT. MUNDY BACK YARD. DAY.

Some months have passed and the back yard has changed. There is a sturdy shed at the end of the driveway in place of the old garage. The gum tree is gone except for the base of the trunk. Part of the garden has been transformed into a plant nursery. Chloe is sitting in the nursery on her own, surrounded by small potted trees. As she tends to them she sings happily to herself. As we move closer we hear WHISPERING. It sounds like the whisper of wind through the leaves of the trees. It sounds like singing. Chloe looks up as Dave pulls into the driveway in an old ute which bears the sign 'MUNDY TREE NURSERY'. Her eyes are bright and clear. She gets up to greet him. Ayu walks out of the shed. She wears old jeans and work boots and her hands are covered in dirt. Jack comes out from the shed behind her. The whole family work together unloading small potted trees from the ute. They laugh and talk as they work. The back door of the house opens and Nini walks out. She is barefoot and wearing an apron.

NINI
Mai, madar malu.

Dave, Ayu and Jack file into the house for lunch. Chloe follows more slowly. She walks past the site of the fallen gum tree. A sapling is growing right out the middle of its stump. As Chloe passes she gives it a gentle caress, trailing her fingers up and over the leaves of the new growth. She walks past the nursery plot and runs her fingers lightly over the tops of the new trees, which appear to lean towards her in response. The movement is subtle. Perhaps it was caused by a gentle gust of wind. But Chloe experiences it differently. The WHISPERING she hears is their many voices, and although we can’t hear what she is saying, we see that she is maintaining a dialogue.

The End