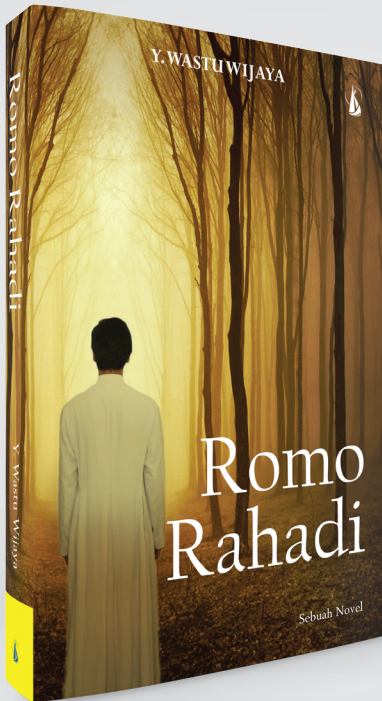




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Romo Rahadi

Our gaze met again.

A wisp of sadness crept inside us.

What was concealed in the mystery of the time? And later?

In a hilariously playful and intellectually-charged romance novel entitled Romo Rahadi, Father Mangunwijaya combines passionate emotions and logical consideration in his storytelling. Through these elements, human experiences are skillfully and holistically interwoven in Romo Rahadi. Compared to other novels such as *Burung-burung Manyar*, an epic story of reflections inside a tempestuous heart, Romo Rahadi contains a more holistic and much deeper contemplation. While *Burung-burung Manyar*

cannot successfully bring the readers to various aspects of human experiences, Romo Rahadi unravels the main character's deep contemplation and discernment. These two novels prove Father Mangunwijaya's excellent writing flair in literature as much as in scientific essays and articles on human affairs.

This novel delves into a unique theme of religious vocation. Mangunwijaya portrays the life of a Catholic priest with all the consequences of his vocation.

This exceptional novel depicts the struggle between being a mere man and being a man of God embedded in the character and flesh of a priest. In the Catholic religion, the role of a priest is more than a professional title. He represents "God's calling". A seminarian has freedom to choose between accepting the calling of priesthood and rejecting the calling. This relatively thick novel promises to reveal the outcome of the main character's dilemma.

Albertus Rahadi is a Javanese man cherished by his family for dedicating his life to priesthood. His family is overjoyed when he tells them he wants to join the seminary. For a devout Catholic family, having a priest from the family is a sign that God is pouring down His blessing to them. Above all this, Rahadi is a sharp-witted, strong, and gorgeous male. After being ordained as a priest, he is

sent to study abroad. There, he meets Hildegard, a French girl, born and raised in Vietnam. Spending her whole life in Hanoi, Hilde has culturally been estranged from Europe, her parents' homeland. Feeling lost after her father's death, she seeks a foothold in the figure of Father Rahadi. Unfortunately, this physically and sexually attractive man vibrating with life is a Catholic priest, bound by a vow of chastity and celibacy. Despite the close bonds, Hilde and Rahadi know from the start that they must restrain themselves from declaring love and attraction.

This friendship is disrupted temporarily when Rahadi must go back to Indonesia. In his journey to Irian (now Papua) for a soul-searching break, he reflects on whether he will continue serving as a priest or he will quit. To his surprise, he boards on the same plane as Hilde who embarks on an

adventure to Irian on her uncle's invitation. Old memories flash back, and the need to complete each other as a normal man and woman resurfaces. In Irian, Rahadi separates from Hilde. At the twist of an event, he reunites with Rosi, a friend and his old flame before joining priesthood.

Caught in the middle of tribal war and revenge, Hilde and a group of expatriates were abducted and dragged into the jungle. To rescue Hilde, Rahadi joins the military troop led by his brother-in-law, Colonel Swantaji. Unfortunately, Hilde succumbs to her wounds and becomes the sole victim. Rahadi is devastated, not only for losing the woman he cares about but also for regretting Hilde's untimely death without any resolution for her quest. The emotional blow heals gradually with the presence of doctor Rosi, a recently widowed woman. They fall back in love and are tempted

strongly to consummate their long-lost love. Rahadi is almost ready to quit priesthood, but Rosi prevents him from giving up priesthood – or literally taking off his robe – and asks him to imagine their future life and reputation in the society. How can they feel at ease with an ex-priest among God's innocent lambs who used to be his congregation? The novel ends with Rahadi's return to Jakarta, to the reality of his life as a priest.

*My heart beats quicker upon
hearing Rosi's name.
Such a name to evoke meaning
in my journey of life.
And of my growth.*

Apparently, being a priest is more about spirituality and faith. A priest is not merely a leader of a group of believers in a religious society. Great temptations to have a woman in his life and to yearn her tangible warmth have made Rahadi falter

in his vocation for many times. Nonetheless, the relentless blows of temptations enable Rahadi to dive deeper into the sea of his vocation. His failed love stories are not his own doing. He wants desperately to love, but both women of his life reject him through inevitable fate and conscious self-sacrifice. Hilde succumbs to her wounds and Rosi cannot picture herself spending the rest of her life with an ex-priest despite the great love she has solely for him.

The portrayal of the character Rahadi as a man and normal human being with healthy sexual appetite is impressive. The portrait of a priest is brilliantly painted. Mangunwijaya is able to portray the sensual temptations vividly. The way Father Rahadi appraises a woman's body is as vibrant as any other man with a healthy sexual drive. Inside the robe, a natural biological drive is pulsating alive. The carnal desire

is surging vivaciously and vibrantly. Regrettably, a pastor is governed by a strict law of celibacy (abstaining from sex and marriage), albeit being more as a personal covenant, but this law does not accommodate erotic desire. Rahadi's internal conflict between plucking the forbidden flower or adhering to the covenant he makes with God has flung him deep into the essence of human free will to determine his own choices.

Mangunwijaya presents the question of free will brilliantly. Freedom entails risks of failure, while faith ensuring salvation without risks of failure is favored by Rahadi. The notion of serenity in the restlessness becomes the unique philosophy in this novel. Internal conflicts faced by Hilde, Rahadi, and Rosi, have brought the readers into deep and contemplative thoughts. For this purpose, the readers have rights

to reject or accept it depending on each reader's philosophy or beliefs. The author is trying to put it in the context of rational considerations, although it is inevitable to disregard the fact that the author is a priest himself, judged from his views of free will.

What if.....what if the worst thing happened? Even if it did, I would be ready for it. Uncle knows my last wish! Kiss Mother for me. My warm big hug for Father Rahadi. (I do not read the last sentence).

Love,
Hildegard Louise Chantal Chastellux
South Irian, August 1967

Set in Irian, the author describes the setting of place candidly and accurately. The meticulous description of the Irian jungle and its topography is presumably based on the author's personal experience. The culture of the local indigenous

people and its place in the human culture is described intellectually and conversantly. Indeed, Manguwijaya's style accentuates the richness of cultural references, quick wit, and humor in responding to life, and sensitivity to the various nuances of language. However, this style might be dangerous and uncontrollable. In this novel, the Swantajis' lengthy and long-winded description on the children's rambunctious scenes does not really contribute to the main storyline. Regrettably, this part disrupts the already complex plot.

The much-debated issue nowadays, i.e. use of oral literature in the written literature, is remarkably featured in Manguwijaya's literary works. Reading the humorous bantering between characters in Manguwijaya's novel reminds the readers of the authenticity of the exchanges. It means that we can imagine how the conversation takes place, because such exchanges are

prevalent in oral communication. To understand this, readers must have rich cultural and linguistic references. Whether oral literature enriches or robs the beauty of the literary work is open for debate. Obviously, oral literature (which is written) can only be understood and enjoyed by the speakers of the given language, even though Mangunwijaya uses a more precise and loyal style than other notable poets and writers such as Darmanto and Umar Kayam.

This novel shows that literature should be the results of intellectual labor instead of merely storytelling. It is a novel and authentic form of contemplation. Mangunwijaya is an intellectual who uses literature to communicate. Thus, the measure of his intellect as a literary man should be in balance with the measure of his literary skills and techniques. In this case, Mangunwijaya has approached such an ideal picture. The novel *Romo Rahadi* is lively, flowing, and

suggestive, despite the flaws of uncontrolled storytelling and lengthy and tedious description of humorous scenes in Chapter six.

About the Author

Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya, Pr (1929–1999). He was graduated from the Philosophy of Theology Institute of Yogyakarta in 1959, and was graduated from the School of Engineering-Rhein-Westfalen, Aachen, Germany in 1966. In 1978 he followed a Fellow of Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, Aspen, USA. Many of his writings have been published as books, and many of his articles have been published in various media. His book entitled *Literature and Religiosity* won the first prize of the Jakarta Arts Council for essay category, in 1982. While the *Manyar Birds* won the South East Asia White Award 1983. Some of his books are translated in Dutch, English, and Japanese.



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