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## A Deconstruction of the Meaning of Character Values in Chairul Harun's Novel "Warisan"

Zulfardi D.<sup>1</sup>, Hendry Sugara<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia

Corresponding author, email: [dosen02790@unpam.ac.id](mailto:dosen02790@unpam.ac.id)

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### Abstrak

This study examines how character education values are constructed and challenged in Chairul Harun's novel *Warisan*. While traditional literary analyses often treat cultural and moral frameworks as fixed guidelines, this research explores how such values are actively contested and renegotiated within the narrative. Using the complete text of *Warisan* as the primary data source, the analysis follows a hermeneutic-deconstructive four-stage process—identifying explicit moral themes, mapping narrative tensions, deconstructing binary oppositions, and synthesizing cultural negotiations—to examine how this Minangkabau regional novel uniquely portrays inheritance and identity as fluid rather than fixed. The findings reveal two main points: first, culturally respected values are frequently used to justify personal or group interests rather than reflecting genuine communal ethics; second, the narrative emphasizes an ongoing negotiation between individual agency and cultural expectations, with characters ultimately prioritizing moral and spiritual legacies over material wealth. By demonstrating that ethical meaning in literature is dynamic rather than absolute, the study challenges traditional, lesson-based approaches to character education. It recommends that literary instruction should focus on developing students' critical literacy and ethical independence. Ultimately, this research contributes to Indonesian literary scholarship by providing a clear analytical framework that connects cultural interpretation with critical reading, while offering actionable insights for teaching character education through regional fiction. Keywords: Deconstruction; Character Education; Literary Hermeneutics; Cultural Negotiation; Indonesian Fiction

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### A. INTRODUCTION

Literature has historically served not only as an aesthetic object but also as a dynamic discursive arena where cultural values, moral principles, and communal identities are perpetually debated (Wang et al., 2026). In Indonesia, regional fiction especially those rooted in Minangkabau socio-cultural frameworks functions as a dynamic archive that encodes, challenges, and reshapes concepts of character and moral behaviour (Syafri et al., 2026). As societies undergo swift modernisation, institutional moralisation, and evolving cultural paradigms, the literary depiction of character education has progressively transitioned from simplistic moralism to intricate representations of ethical ambiguity, generational conflict, and ideological contention (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023; Li et al., 2024). Chairul Harun's novel *Warisan* illustrates this dynamic,

presenting a narrative landscape where conventional ideals, communal obligations, and individual agency converge, frequently in paradoxical or unresolved configurations that defy simple moral interpretation

Conventional literary criticism has often analysed such writings from structuralist or moral-realist perspectives, regarding character values as fixed, culturally normative, and educationally transferrable. The incorporation of poststructuralist theory into literary studies has significantly transformed scholars' understanding of meaning (Jeyaraj, 2024). Jacques Derrida's deconstruction specifically contests the illusion of textual and cultural stability by revealing the intrinsic inconsistencies, deferred meaning (*différance*), and hierarchical binary oppositions that support ostensibly cohesive moral narratives (Carls & Carls, 2024). When strategically combined with a hermeneutic approach, which reconstructs contextual, receptive, and aesthetic levels of meaning, deconstruction serves as a useful methodological tool for examining how literary texts both establish and undermine cultural systems (Kholodniak, 2023). This hermeneutic-deconstructive synergy allows scholars to progress beyond thematic categorisation to critically analyse the production, strategic manipulation, and internal contestation of values within the textual fabric (Henriksen et al., 2025).

Notwithstanding the theoretical advantages of this integrated approach, current scholarship on Indonesian regional literature, including analyses of Chairul Harun's works, predominantly adheres to descriptive, structural, or sociocultural frameworks. Current assessments of Warisan mostly emphasise the thematic recognition of Minangkabau customs, moral instruction, or character archetypes, frequently regarding cultural nobility as a static legacy to be conserved and conveyed (Author, Year; Author, Year). Such studies often neglect the textual mechanisms by which "noble values" are strategically constructed, sarcastically undermined, or rendered internally contradictory through narrative strategy and dialogic tension. The novel often simplifies the link between human agency and cultural systems into a harmonic synthesis, overlooking the fractures, power imbalances, and ideological manipulations that a deconstructive analysis emphasises. Thus, a significant academic need remains: the lack of research that examines character ideals not as fixed moral dictates, but as dynamic, contested, and culturally shaped constructs.

This study fills the gap by framing Warisan as a textual domain where cultural valorisation and human-culture dialectics are perpetually demolished rather than validated. By combining hermeneutic interpretation with Derridean deconstruction, the analysis transcends moral extraction to explore how the novel's symbolic dichotomies, narrative ambiguities, and intercharacter conversations generate an undecidability of ethical significance. This research is novel due to its dual analytical focus: first, it reinterprets culturally esteemed traits as strategically constructed for individual or collective interests; second, it examines the dialectical interaction between human subjects and cultural systems, which favours ongoing negotiation over final synthesis. This study positions the novel as an active contributor to the critical redefinition of character education in modern cultural discourse, rather than viewing literature as a mere collection of enduring ethical models (Creely & Blannin, 2025; Jawad et al., 2025).

This study seeks to analyse the significance of character values in Chairul Harun's Warisan by examining the invocation, manipulation, and destabilisation of traditional cultural frameworks within the story. The study employs a systematic hermeneutic-deconstructive approach to examine the binary oppositions, ideological constructs, and dialectical tensions that define the novel's ethical framework. Ultimately, it aims to illustrate how literary deconstruction might

reconceptualize character education not as a static moral curriculum, but as a continuous, critically reflecting process intertwined with the intricate dynamics of literature, culture, and human agency.

## **B. METHOD**

### **1. Research Design and Theoretical Orientation**

This study employs a qualitative interpretive framework tailored for literary criticism. Rather than adopting a positivist stance, the design functions as a systematic textual engagement that moves from descriptive observation to critical analysis. Grounded in Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and philosophical hermeneutics, the approach operates in two complementary phases: a hermeneutic reconstruction of the novel's apparent value systems, followed by a deconstructive examination of their internal contradictions, semantic deferrals, and hierarchical subversions. The methodology is deliberately non-prescriptive; it does not seek to extract fixed moral lessons but to trace how character values are produced, contested, and renegotiated within the narrative structure.

### **2. Data Corpus and Sources**

The primary data comprises the complete text of Chairul Harun's novel *Warisan* ([Publisher, Year] edition). The novel is treated as a self-contained semiotic field where linguistic choices, narrative patterns, and symbolic elements convey cultural and ethical meanings. Secondary sources include scholarly works on Derridean deconstruction, hermeneutic theory, Minangkabau socio-cultural studies, and contemporary character education. These texts function as interpretive lenses rather than empirical datasets, ensuring the analysis remains grounded in literary theory while remaining culturally and pedagogically informed.

### **3. Data Collection and Analytical Procedure**

Data collection proceeds through iterative close reading and rigorous textual annotation. Passages are selected based on three criteria: (1) explicit or implicit representations of character values (e.g., religiosity, customary norms, humor, intergenerational dynamics); (2) instances of narrative tension, symbolic density, or dialogic contradiction; and (3) relevance to the novel's exploration of heritage and cultural identity. Each excerpt is catalogued with precise locational metadata (chapter/page) and accompanied by contextual notes on narrative perspective, cultural resonance, and intertextual links. This process replaces conventional data coding with a transparent interpretive trail that enhances scholarly accountability and allows peer verification.

The analysis unfolds in four integrated stages:

- a. **Hermeneutic Reconstruction:** Initial readings map the text's constructive meanings across receptive (normative/religious), ironic (critical/humorous), and aesthetic (symbolic/erotic) registers, situating them within their Minangkabau cultural context.
- b. **Binary Mapping:** Stabilized oppositions (e.g., sacred/profane, material/spiritual inheritance, collective duty/individual autonomy, tradition/modernity) are identified as the narrative's provisional structural framework.
- c. **Deconstructive Analysis:** Drawing on Derridean concepts of *différance*, supplementarity, and undecidability, this phase traces how the text unsettles its own binaries. Ironic reversals, narrative gaps, dialogic tensions, and symbolic ambiguities are examined to reveal how "noble values" are strategically constructed, deferred, or rendered internally inconsistent.
- d. **Reconstructive Synthesis:** The final stage reframes character ideals not as fixed moral dictates but as dynamic constructs emerging from the ongoing negotiation between human agency and

cultural frameworks. This synthesis links textual instability to broader discourses on character education and cultural negotiation.

#### 4. Interpretive Rigor

Given the interpretive nature of literary analysis, scholarly rigor is maintained through four safeguards: (1) Theoretical triangulation, cross-referencing deconstructive, hermeneutic, and Minangkabau cultural perspectives to prevent reductive readings; (2) Researcher reflexivity, consciously suspending normative moral judgments to focus on textual mechanics rather than authorial intent; (3) Textual traceability, anchoring every interpretive claim in direct quotations with precise page references to ensure verifiable analysis; and (4) Dialogic verification, situating preliminary findings within established scholarship on Indonesian regional fiction and poststructuralist criticism to confirm contextual and theoretical coherence. Together, these measures position deconstruction not as an abstract theoretical label, but as a disciplined, transparent method for examining the formation and instability of character values in literary narratives.

### C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Results

##### 1. Descriptive Findings: Textual Evidence and Narrative Patterns

The novel *Warisan* establishes its moral and cultural landscape through three recurrent narrative registers. First, the receptive dimension foregrounds religiosity and Minangkabau customary law. This is evident in the opening interaction where Sarijah, rather than requesting material compensation, asks Rafilus for a “*kain sembahyang*” (prayer cloth), framing the object as a marker of spiritual sincerity (*Warisan*, p. 8). The narrative further codifies inheritance through explicit legal distinctions: “*pusaka tinggi, pusaka rendah, dan harta pencaharian*,” directly mirroring the matrilineal system’s socio-legal framework. Second, the ironic register emerges through familial disputes over wealth. As relatives gather to claim the estate, the text reveals its depletion, culminating in the stark declaration that the inheritance has become “*tulang tanpa daging*” (bones without flesh), a phrase that underscores the disparity between mythic abundance and economic reality. Third, the aesthetic dimension regulates intimacy through culturally bounded metaphors; for instance, the growing closeness between Rafilus and Maimunah is rendered through the imagery of a “*kuda dan joki*” (horse and jockey), evoking traditional racing imagery while maintaining narrative restraint.

Beyond these registers, the text systematically establishes and disrupts binary oppositions. The request for the prayer cloth is immediately complicated by Sarijah’s social position as a widow, a figure locally stereotyped as materialistic or morally ambiguous. Similarly, the narrative contrasts the extended family’s demand for financial distribution with Bagindo Thahar and Rafilus’s insistence on “*darah, budi, dan ruh*” (blood, character, and spirit) as the true legacy (*Warisan*, p. 146). This tension peaks when Rafilus explicitly rejects inherited debts, stating, “*Saya tidak mewarisi harta yang habis, apalagi utang yang bukan beban saya*,” thereby nullifying material claims. Finally, the motif of the “*loko tua*” (old German locomotive) halting fifty meters before Kuraitaji station after a three-hour delay is juxtaposed with the customary proverb “*adat tidak lapuk oleh panas, tidak lekang oleh hujan*.” The locomotive’s incomplete arrival physically mirrors the proverb’s idealized permanence, creating a visible gap between traditional expectation and contemporary practice.

## 2. Interpretive Discussion: Deconstructive Readings of Textual Evidence

Reading these descriptive patterns through a hermeneutic-deconstructive lens reveals how the novel's apparent moral stability is continuously unsettled by its own narrative mechanisms. The "prayer cloth" motif initially constructs a receptive framework of piety, but its association with a widowed figure introduces an ironic fracture. Rather than reinforcing a sacred/profane binary, the narrative suspends moral judgment, demonstrating how ethical meaning is mediated through social stigma and interpretive negotiation. The text does not resolve this tension; instead, it leaves the reader oscillating between spiritual authenticity and cultural prejudice, illustrating that moral values in the novel are never presented as pure or absolute.

The binary between material and immaterial inheritance operates similarly. While traditional readings might frame Rafilus's rejection of debt as a triumph of spiritual values, a deconstructive close reading shows it as a strategic suspension of transactional logic. By refusing to assume obligations he did not incur, Rafilus does not replace material inheritance with a new moral absolute; rather, he exposes inheritance itself as a site of ethical contestation. The locomotive metaphor further destabilizes cultural certainty. The text does not simply lament the decline of *adat*; instead, the train's delayed, partial arrival performs a structural *différance*. Customary law is neither fully obsolete nor entirely intact—it is continuously postponed and recontextualized by modern socio-economic conditions. This prevents the narrative from achieving ideological closure, positioning *adat* as a living negotiation rather than a static artifact.

Consequently, the novel's portrayal of cultural values reveals them as strategically mobilized rather than organically preserved. The selective invocation of *gotong royong* and the elders' monopolization of customary authority are textualized not as nostalgic traditions, but as mechanisms of hierarchical maintenance. Rafilus's dialogues with Bagindo Thahar consistently reframe filial duty and moral autonomy as active negotiations rather than passive adherence. Through this dialectic, the narrative positions human agency not as subordinate to cultural systems, but as a transformative force that continuously redefines their boundaries. The textual evidence thus demonstrates that character values in *Warisan* are not fixed moral directives, but dynamic constructs shaped by irony, contradiction, and ongoing cultural negotiation.

## Discussion

### 1. Ideological Engineering and the Deconstruction of "Noble" Cultural Values

The novel *Warisan* does not depict Minangkabau customary norms or Christian ethics as inherent, eternal moral frameworks. Instead, it presents them as discursive creations that are perpetually activated, selectively maintained, and intentionally crafted to validate individual or communal goals (Özkan, 2026). This corresponds with Derrida's assertion that logocentric stability is a fallacy: what is perceived as "noble heritage" is invariably permeated by power, calculation, and historical contingency. The textual request for a "prayer cloth" (*kain sembahyang*) primarily functions within a receptive, religio-moral framework. However, the narrative promptly undermines this interpretation by placing the request within the context of a widow figure—a social category historically associated with implications of materialism or moral ambiguity in local speech. The book does not merely reverse the binary of sacred and profane; rather, it reveals the remnants of ethical sincerity below socially imposed shame, illustrating that moral meaning is never unadulterated but consistently mediated through cultural context and interpretive negotiation (Abazeri, 2026; Abdellatif & Haynes, 2025).

This mechanism reflects the wider Indonesian sociocultural context of the New Order period, during which local wisdom and traditional rites were actively utilised to bolster political stability and national uniformity. The work illustrates the deterioration of gotong royong and the indifference of newer generations towards communal labour, serving not only as a lament for moral decline. It exposes how traditional solidarity was hierarchically controlled by elder elites who monopolised cultural authority, thus diminishing communal ethics to a mere performance facade. Prior studies on Minangkabau fiction has often interpreted themes as direct representations of adat continuity or moral deterioration, employing structuralist or sociological analyses that derive prescriptive values. This research reveals that the text critically examines the creation of moral authority, illustrating how "noble values" become vacuous when separated from genuine ethical practice and utilised as instruments of societal control (Budyono, 2025).

## **2. Binary Oppositions and the Aporia of Human-Cultural Dialectics**

The narrative structure of *Warisan* is upheld by a succession of binary oppositions: material against non-material heritage, traditional versus unconventional lineage, and communal obligation versus individual resistance. Derridean deconstruction does not aim to reconcile these oppositions into a cohesive dialectic; instead, it reveals their structural undecidability. The primary struggle between Bagindo Thahar/Rafilus (who prioritise "blood, character, and spirit" as genuine inheritance) and the extended relatives (who want material distribution) exemplifies this clearly. The text rejects the Hegelian progression of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Rafilus's public refusal to settle inherited debts serves as a deconstructive supplement; it does not supplant material inheritance with a new moral absolute, but rather suspends the economy of transactional obligation, exposing inheritance as a domain of ethical negotiation rather than legal or cultural determinism.

This recontextualization has profound ramifications for character education (Yoon, 2026). Conventional educational frameworks frequently use literature as a medium for moral instruction, presuming that the values inside texts can be retrieved, assimilated, and replicated (Ghorbani et al., 2026; Ribbers et al., 2024; Taheri et al., 2025). *Warisan* undermines this instructional framework by presenting character not as a static trait but as an ongoing process of critical reflection. The hermeneutic-deconstructive reading technique utilised here connects initial horizon-fusion (acknowledging the novel's moral and aesthetic dimensions) with subsequent textual analysis (revealing the contradictions that obstruct definitive moral resolution). This research portrays Rafilus's posture not as a straightforward victory of spiritual over material values, as other studies have suggested, but as a complex intervention that challenges the logic of inheritance as possession. Human agency arises not as a passive cultural heritage but as an active, occasionally disruptive force that redefines the limits between individual autonomy and collective expectation.

## **3. Critique of Modernity and the Symbolic Collapse of Adat**

The theme of the "old German locomotive" (loko tua) stopping fifty metres before Kuritaji station, delayed by three hours, serves as a powerful structural metaphor for the functional deterioration of Minangkabau adat in the context of modern instrumental logic. This symbol may superficially be interpreted as a wistful sorrow for the decline of tradition. However, the work

conducts a dual critique: it reveals modernity's inability to provide punctuality, order, and ethical consistency, while also deconstructing the idealised concept of "adat yang tak lapuk oleh panas." The locomotive's partial arrival indicates not the demise of tradition, but the inability of its total manifestation. Adat, akin to a train, is perpetually postponed, consistently augmented by current demands, and never quite retrievable as an authentic, untainted system.

This twofold critique reflects current Indonesian cultural concerns regarding globalisation, the commercialisation of indigenous knowledge, and the institutionalisation of legacy as cultural tourism instead of a lived experience (Antikowati et al., 2023). The novel neither promotes a reversion to pre-modern customary law nor supports uncritical modernisation. Instead, it presents a cultural *différance* in which meaning is continuously shifted between idealised heritage and shattered modernity. Prior literary studies of regional literature have frequently conformed to either cultural preservationism or modernist progressivism, therefore perpetuating the binaries that the text aims to undermine. By rejecting closure, *Warisan* establishes literature as a vital arena where cultural conflicts are not reconciled but rather constructively maintained, encouraging readers to partake in ethical contemplation instead of ideological loyalty (Setiawan, 2026).

#### **4. Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications**

This study's merger of hermeneutics with Derridean deconstruction provides a methodological recalibration for literary research on character values. Hermeneutics offers the essential interpretive flexibility required to interact with the text's cultural and aesthetic dimensions; deconstruction guarantees that this interaction does not devolve into moral didacticism or theoretical determinism. The results indicate that character education within literary contexts should transition from value extraction to critical literacy. Students engaging with books like as *Warisan* should be encouraged to examine the construction, contestation, and contextualization of moral frameworks, rather than being directed to adopt them as standard norms.

This method immediately contests the enduring inclination in Indonesian literary education to regard fiction as a source of prescriptive ethics. This work enhances current discussions in poststructuralist literary criticism, cultural studies, and critical character education by emphasising textual undecidability, ideological engineering, and the dialectics of human-culture negotiation. It asserts that the pedagogical significance of literature is not in its potential to provide moral certitude, but in its capacity to foster ethical enquiry, reveal cultural contradictions, and promote interpretive independence. Subsequent study may use this hermeneutic-deconstructive paradigm to comparative studies of regional fiction, drama, or oral storytelling, therefore elucidating how Indonesian literary texts navigate the tension between cultural heritage and current ethical plurality.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the character values in Chairul Harun's *Warisan* are not static moral prescriptions but dynamically constructed through narrative tension, ironic subversion, and cultural negotiation. Rather than treating tradition and individual agency as opposing forces, the novel stages their continuous dialectic, revealing that ethical meaning emerges not from authoritative inheritance but from active textual and social contestation. By integrating philosophical hermeneutics with Derridean deconstruction, the research shows how literary texts simultaneously construct and destabilize cultural norms, thereby reframing character education from a model of moral transmission to one of critical literacy.

For literary education, these findings carry direct pedagogical implications. Classroom instruction should move beyond extracting prescriptive moral lessons and instead facilitate dialogic reading practices that train students to trace how values are engineered, contested, and contextualized within narrative discourse. By engaging with textual ambiguity and ideological contradiction, learners develop ethical autonomy and interpretive resilience, positioning literature as a space for critical moral inquiry rather than doctrinal reinforcement.

Given the study's focus on a single textual corpus, future research should expand this hermeneutic-deconstructive framework in three directions: first, through comparative analyses of other Indonesian regional fictions to identify patterns of value construction across diverse cultural and historical contexts; second, via empirical classroom studies that assess how deconstructive reading strategies impact students' critical literacy, moral reasoning, and interpretive independence; and third, by integrating intersectional theoretical lenses—such as feminist, postcolonial, or ecocritical deconstruction—to examine how gender, power, and environmental discourses shape the negotiation of character values. Ultimately, this research affirms that the educational power of literature lies not in delivering moral certainty, but in cultivating readers capable of navigating cultural complexity with critical reflexivity and ethical independence.

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