

Visualizing Sacred Narrative: A Case Study on The Intersemiotic Translation of *The Book of Esther* into Balinese Painting

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Abstract: This study examines the intersemiotic translation of *The Book of Esther* into Balinese paintings in the *Cheerful Good News* collection published by the Indonesian Bible Society (2007). Using a qualitative case study, it analyzes how biblical narratives are reinterpreted through Balinese visual aesthetics using strategies of reduction, addition, focalization, integration, and symbolic adaptation. Each artwork is explored for textual fidelity, cultural and symbolic localization, and multimodal construction. The study highlights how simplification, substitution, and narrative emphasis reframe themes like courage, justice, and divine providence. While some narrative elements are condensed or altered, theological meanings are retained through symbolic codes and emotional framing. Rather than one-to-one equivalence, the process reflects interpretive transformation based on cultural and semiotic norms. The article contributes to translation studies and visual anthropology by applying intersemiotic frameworks within Southeast Asia, demonstrating how sacred texts are visually reimaged through local idioms rooted in religious symbolism and aesthetic tradition.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation; Balinese painting; biblical narrative; cultural adaptation; multimodality

1. Introduction

Across cultures and eras, sacred texts have not only been read but also seen, heard, and performed. In societies where visual storytelling is deeply rooted in tradition, religious narratives often transcend linguistic boundaries and take form through artistic expression. Balinese painting, with its intricate details, symbolic richness, and spiritual depth, serves as one such medium through which stories are not merely told but visualized. In recent decades, initiatives

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such as those by the Indonesian Bible Society have introduced biblical narratives into local artistic forms, encouraging not only interfaith engagement but also cultural reinterpretation. These visual adaptations invite closer examination of how verbal meanings are transformed into visual representations, a process referred to as intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 1959).

The Book of Esther, a tale from the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament in Christian tradition, provides a powerful illustration of intersemiotic translation. This story, which takes place in the Persian Empire about 2,500 years ago, emphasizes themes of bravery, leadership, and divine providence (Collins, 2014). Scholarly discussions over *The Book of Esther's* religious and secular aspects have been triggered by the fact that it is unique among biblical writings in that it does not particularly address God (Friedman & Friedman, 2012; Worral, 2020). Because of its narrative distinctiveness, particularly the absence of explicit references to God, the Book of Esther has become a compelling subject for artistic interpretation. Notably, the story was turned into Balinese paintings by the Indonesian Bible Society in 2007 as a part of their kid-friendly "Cheerful Good News" series ("Kabar Baik Ceria") (Indonesia, 2007). These illustrations were created by Nyoman Darsane, a Balinese painter born in Desa Blahbatuh, Gianyar, who was deeply influenced by local Hindu rituals and *wayang* storytelling traditions. Educated formally at Universitas Diponegoro in Semarang, Darsane developed a visual language that blends sacred iconography, surreal composition, and narrative clarity. This distinctive style makes him especially suited for reinterpreting biblical texts through culturally resonant visual expressions (Tjokropramono & Ferninaindis, 2022). The visuals frequently take center stage in the narrative structure of these illustrations, which use both textual and visual components to direct interpretation.

Previous research on intersemiotic translation has primarily concentrated on various forms of media; however, studies focusing on traditional painting, especially in non-Western contexts, have remained limited. Thematically, these studies were grouped into four major clusters. First, in the domain of performing and visual arts, Liang (2023) discussed intersemiotic translation in screenplays and theater, analyzing how literary scenes were adapted into visual performance through techniques such as focalization and integration. Similarly, Lass (2023) explored how stage productions transformed written texts into multimodal performances using visual and auditory modalities, reinforcing the role of theatrical production as intersemiotic translation. Second, research in audiovisual media, including films and television dramas, is exemplified by Mubenga-Tshitaka et al. (2022) and Kostopoulou (2022), who examined how visual and linguistic signs worked together to convey meaning across modalities, particularly in cross-cultural screen adaptations. Third,

studies on musical adaptations such as those by Susam-Saraeva (2021) and Yeung (2008) showed how lyrics were adapted to different cultural settings, demonstrating how intersemiotic shifts occurred between verbal content and musical expression. Fourth, in the field of visual literature, scholars such as Nodelman (2019), Kruger (2012), and Paprocka (2018) analyzed picture books, while Borodo (2015) and Borodo (2023) focused on comics.

These works highlighted how images complemented or reinterpreted textual narratives, emphasizing the interplay between visual layout and linguistic sequencing. Galván (2019) contributed a comparative model to trace shifts in meaning across intersemiotic translation in picture books, highlighting how visual choices reshaped narrative interpretation. While these studies collectively provided valuable insights into the complexities of cross-modal translation, they largely focused on Western or East Asian contexts and on modern media formats. In contrast, this study addressed the less explored practice of translating biblical texts into traditional Balinese paintings, thereby expanding the scope of intersemiotic translation into a new cultural and artistic domain.

Building upon this gap, several theoretical frameworks have recently been applied to understand how meaning shifts between verbal and visual modes. For example, Liang (2023) explored the intersemiotic translation of Tang poetry into Chinese paintings using focalization, equivalence, and integration, while Leontovich (2019) examined how Russian literary texts are transformed into visual representations through techniques such as reduction, addition, and reinterpretation. These approaches emphasize how culturally embedded symbolism and narrative emphasis guide visual adaptation, offering useful lenses for analyzing how stories cross semiotic boundaries. However, these models remain under-tested in the context of Southeast Asian visual traditions, particularly those as codified and symbolic as Balinese painting.

Accordingly, this study focuses on the visual adaptation of *The Book of Esther* into Balinese paintings, produced by the Indonesian Bible Society in the Kabar Baik Ceria series. *The Book of Esther* offers a unique narrative, rich in political intrigue, moral dilemmas, and symbolic action. Notably, it is devoid of any direct reference to God, which makes it particularly open to diverse interpretations. Its transformation into Balinese visual culture presents an ideal case for examining how global religious narratives are translated through local aesthetic systems. By applying intersemiotic translation strategies (Liang, 2023; Leontovich, 2019) in the analysis, this study seeks to reveal how meaning is visually constructed through the techniques of addition, focalization, reduction, and symbolic reinterpretation within a culturally distinct artistic grammar.

By investigating the application and adaptation of intersemiotic translation strategies such as addition, focalization, and reinterpretation as articulated by Leontovich (2019) and Liang (2023) within the context of Balinese visual culture, this study aims to address the underrepresentation of Southeast Asian traditions in current translation scholarship. It explores how traditional artistic features such as color symbolism, narrative framing, and iconographic conventions in Balinese painting influence the visualization of biblical narratives, particularly *The Book of Esther*. In doing so, the study contributes to three key areas: (1) it empirically tests established intersemiotic frameworks in a new, culturally distinct setting; (2) it enriches understanding of how sacred texts are reinterpreted through indigenous aesthetics; and (3) it expands the theoretical landscape of intersemiotic translation by showing how visual media operate as fluid spaces of cultural negotiation and meaning-making. Ultimately, this work offers a bridge between global religious narratives and local artistic heritage, emphasizing the transformative potential of visual storytelling in cross-cultural contexts.

2. Literature Review

Intersemiotic translation, as introduced by Jakobson (1959), refers to the process of interpreting verbal signs by means of signs from non-verbal sign systems. It involves the transfer of meaning from one semiotic mode to another such as from language to image, music, or movement. This type of translation is sometimes described in broader terms as a form of semiotic transformation or representational adaptation, highlighting its cross-modal and cross-cultural nature. Unlike traditional interlingual translation, which focuses on linguistic equivalence, intersemiotic translation emphasizes how meaning is reconfigured through different expressive resources across media and modalities. Recent studies have shifted toward expressing meaning through non-verbal signs, extending beyond traditional linguistic boundaries (Yubin et al., 2025). Apart from cultural adaptation, a major concept in intersemiotic translation is multimodality, which has proved rather important in this field. This method stresses works that integrate language with several semiotic instruments, that is, both static and dynamic visual elements. Acting as an interdisciplinary approach, multimodality emphasizes the several ways used in the communication of ideas, emotions, and concepts. It highlights how language is not limited; rather, it shows how closely language and other signs interact (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

By means of cultural and linguistic transsemiosis, Holubenko (2023) offers a theoretical basis for intersemiotic translation. She emphasizes that it involves interpretation and reinterpretation, making it an evolving rather than

a fixed outcome. The three primary forms of intersemiotic translation include shifts in the translator's mental state, changes in the medium of signs, and the correspondence between the source and target texts, which often results in imperfect equivalence. This imperfect equivalence aligns with Ding (2024) notion that intersemiotic transmutation lacks structural isomorphism and relies instead on iconic and indexical reasoning to reconstruct meaning across modalities. In this case, modality plays a crucial role, encompassing semantic, pragmatic, syntactic, and grammatical aspects, highlighting the translator's cognitive and emotional engagement with the text. Challenges arise in maintaining cultural meaning across different semiotic systems, with critiques targeting rigid structuralist approaches. This concept is increasingly relevant in linguistics, media studies, and cross-cultural communication, emphasizing creativity and subjectivity in meaning-making.

Especially in the *Journey to the West* adaptations, Xinru (2023) investigates intersemiotic changes in subtitle translations. She names six fundamental techniques including addition, omission, and compensation that help the original story line line-up with viewer expectations. Rich cultural insights are provided by the way nonverbal signals like gestures and visual images enhance the verbal story. Emphasizing the part para-verbal and visual modes play in improving narrative coherence, this paper highlights the dynamic potential of multimodal frameworks in translating.

Emphasizing the bidirectional relationship between source material and its visual adaptation, Perdikaki (2017) frames intersemiotic translation in the framework of cinema adaptations. She emphasizes the part paratextual elements, such as reviews, trailers, and interviews which shape audience understanding; and the recontextualization of themes to appeal to modern viewers. Her examination of *P.S. I Love You* shows how narrative core and character dynamics are reinterpreted for cinematic viewers, therefore balancing creative reinterpretation with accuracy to the source. Mahasneh & Abdelal (2022) demonstrate how picture book illustrations can undergo resemiotization across languages and cultures, supporting intersemiotic translation through Peirce's semiotic triad framework.

Focusing on the adaptation of Russian literary works into visual media, Leontovich (2019) offers a thorough study of intersemiotic translating techniques. Her work assigns methods into reinterpretation, addition, and reduction. While addition incorporates visual elements that could enhance the narrative, reduction refers to the simplicity of textual elements that are difficult to visually express. Reinterpretation addresses the limitations of the media by ensuring that the visual portrayal matches the intention of the original and so promotes artistic expression. Leontovich's paradigm provides a basic instrument for examining

cultural and artistic adaptations and has been very helpful in understanding the transformation of spoken materials into stationary visual forms. Liang (2023) broadens the discussion by examining the intersemiotic translation of Tang poetry into Chinese paintings. Her study emphasizes techniques such as equivalence, focalization, contrast, and integration.

While focalizing emphasizes particular elements to direct the audience's attention, equivalency gives preservation of narrative essence top priority. Integration combines several visual elements to produce a single narrative. Liang's works highlight the need for artistic standards and cultural background since they show how conventional themes and symbols help viewers to interact with visual interpretations of poetry books.

Asserting that effective communication requires the integration of several modes, Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001) locate intersemiotic translation within a multimodal framework. This point of view is quite compatible with the challenges of turning biblical literature, such the Book of Esther, into Balinese artworks, where textual, visual, and cultural elements must synchronize to properly convey meaning.

Although this research improves knowledge of intersemiotic translation, most of them focus on Western and East Asian cultural settings. Particularly with regard to the influence of local cultural patterns and artistic traditions on the translation process, the inclusion of bible stories into Balinese visual art is not well studied. Furthermore, even although strategies including reduction, addition, and focalization have been acknowledged, their relevance to Balinese art forms calls more attention especially in harmonizing the spiritual profundity of biblical texts with the vivid symbolic legacy of Balinese painting.

Recent scholarship has emphasized that intersemiotic translation requires careful attention to both textual and visual aspects, particularly when dealing with culturally embedded narratives and artistic expressions. This body of research provides a strong foundation for analyzing creative and cultural adaptations, offering conceptual tools such as modality shifts, focalization, symbolic reinterpretation, and multimodal integration (Holubenko: 2023; Xinru, 2023; Perdikaki, 2017; Leontovich, 2019; Liang, 2023). The unique difficulties of combining Balinese cultural components with biblical narratives offer a fascinating chance for more study. This study aims to close these gaps by analyzing the application of intersemiotic translation techniques to modify the Book of Esther into Balinese art, therefore providing new angles on cultural adaptation and multimodal communication dynamics.

3. Method and Theory

3.1 Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to examine the intersemiotic translation of *The Book of Esther* into Balinese painting. As Creswell (2013) explains, qualitative research is suitable for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, while a case study enables an in-depth exploration of a bounded system within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). In this study, the bounded case is the adaptation of a biblical narrative into Balinese traditional visual art. The qualitative case study method is particularly appropriate for investigating complex meaning-making processes at the intersection of textual, artistic, and cultural systems. It allows the researcher to capture how narrative meaning is visually transformed using culturally specific symbols and techniques. Rather than seeking generalization, the study aims to generate contextual understanding by triangulating textual and visual data, supported by relevant theoretical literature on intersemiotic translation and multimodality.

3.1.1 Data Collection

The data in this study consisted of both primary and secondary sources. The primary data comprised textual and visual elements. The visual data were purposively selected from the Cheerful Good News (Kabar Baik Ceria) collection published by Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia (Indonesian Bible Society, 2007), which features Balinese-style illustrations of biblical narratives, including *The Book of Esther*. Seven images were selected based on narrative significance and visual richness to represent key moments in the story. The corresponding textual data were drawn from the New International Version (NIV) of *The Book of Esther*, consisting of 10 chapters and 167 verses (Biblica, 2011). The text was used as the source narrative to analyze how meaning was transformed into visual language. The study used purposive sampling according to Paton (2015) to ensure the selection of data was both relevant and information-rich.

Secondary data consisted of peer-reviewed literature on intersemiotic translation (e.g., Leontovich, 2019; Liang, 2023), multimodal discourse theory (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), and cultural adaptation (Holubenko, 2023; Xinru, 2023). These sources informed and supported the analysis and interpretation of the primary data.

3.1.2 Data Analysis

This study applied thematic analysis to identify intersemiotic translation mechanisms within the selected Balinese paintings of *The Book of Esther*. The process began with an initial close reading of the visual data alongside

the corresponding textual passages to understand narrative alignment and divergence. Each image was examined in terms of composition, character depiction, symbolism, and spatial arrangement.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis, the researcher first familiarized herself with the data and then generated initial codes based on observable intersemiotic strategies. These included recurring visual patterns reflecting narrative compression, character emphasis, symbolic substitution, and shifts in perspective. The codes were subsequently organized into broader themes aligned with translation techniques such as reduction, addition, and reinterpretation (Leontovich, 2019), as well as focalization, equivalence, and integration (Liang, 2023)

Each theme was analyzed across images to determine how the visual adaptations represented key theological, moral, or cultural elements of the original biblical narrative. The analysis also examined how Balinese visual conventions shaped the re-interpretation of these themes. Cultural contextualization was conducted by integrating insights from Holubenko (2023), Xinru (2023), and Perdikaki (2017), focusing on how traditional Balinese symbolism and artistic norms informed the translation process.

Interpretive description was used to explain the function and meaning of each identified theme within both the biblical and Balinese cultural frameworks. This analytic process allowed for both intra-case (within each image) and cross-case (across images) comparisons, yielding insights into how local visual language re-articulates global religious narratives.

3.2 Theory

This study constructs its theoretical framework by integrating semiotic theory, intersemiotic translation, multimodal discourse analysis, and eco-translatology to examine how biblical narratives are visually reinterpreted in Balinese paintings.

It begins with classical semiotic foundations. Ferdinand de Saussure defined a sign as the dyadic relation between the signifier (sound/image) and the signified (concept), laying the groundwork for linguistic-based analysis of meaning-making (Saussure, 1916). Charles Sanders Peirce expanded this into a triadic model comprising the representamen, object, and interpretant, emphasizing the interpretative process through which signs acquire meaning (Nöte, 2018). This framework is essential in understanding how viewers decode visual elements in the paintings, based on cultural context and prior knowledge, especially when verbal texts are transmuted into visual forms.

Central to this study is Roman Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation, defined as the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems (Jakobson, 1959). This includes transformation across modalities such as from text to image via techniques such as transmutation, reduction, addition, and semiotic recreation. Furthermore, as Mowafy (2024) emphasizes, intersemiotic translation is a multidirectional process of resemiotization that reshapes meaning across modalities and engages the translator's cognitive and affective faculties. These strategies help visualize narrative structures, characters, and theological symbols in a culturally resonant way.

The study also draws on Multimodal Discourse Theory by Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001), which analyzes how images convey meaning through three metafunctions:

1. Representational meaning (what is depicted),
2. Interactive meaning (how the viewer is positioned), and
3. Compositional meaning (how elements are arranged).

This theory enables a layered analysis of how visual codes, layout, gaze, and cultural motifs interact to construct coherent semiotic narratives in the paintings. Additionally, insights from Eco-Translatology, Chen (2024) inform the study's understanding of translation as an adaptive process governed by ecological factors such as linguistic form, cultural context, and communicative purpose. This emphasizes the artist-translator's agency in selecting and modifying elements that ensure relevance and resonance within the Balinese sociocultural environment.

Following Kourdis & Petrilli (2020), intersemiotic translation is understood not merely as a shift in medium but as a semiotic act of cultural recontextualization. It involves ethical, cognitive, and affective engagement with meaning-making across sign systems, allowing sacred texts to take new forms while preserving their spiritual significance.

Lastly, while the preceding frameworks offer a general basis for visual and semiotic analysis, understanding Balinese painting requires attention to its culturally embedded visual traditions. Balinese painting is rooted in a long-standing visual tradition that integrates religious symbolism, ceremonial function, and narrative clarity. Characterized by symmetrical layout, vivid red-and-gold color schemes, stylized figures, and layered spatial composition, Balinese artworks function as visual texts conveying spiritual and cultural values. As noted by Karja & Feldman (2024), Balinese artists often employ dualities such as *lanang-wadon* (male-female) and cosmic oppositions to express metaphysical principles through pictorial form. Nuriarta et al. (2024) further

observe that Balinese visual art frequently embeds indigenous motifs such as wood-carved furnishings, ritual attire, and sacred objects to localize external narratives within culturally resonant frameworks. These aesthetic features serve not only as stylistic markers but also as adaptive strategies in visual storytelling and cultural recontextualization, allowing foreign tales like *The Book of Esther* to be reinterpreted through localized, symbolic visual languages.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the paintings as dynamic products of translation, cultural adaptation, and semiotic interpretation. They also align with the reviewers' suggestions to integrate perspectives from classical semiotics, transmutation theory, and translation studies to enrich the study's analytical depth.

4. Results and Discussion

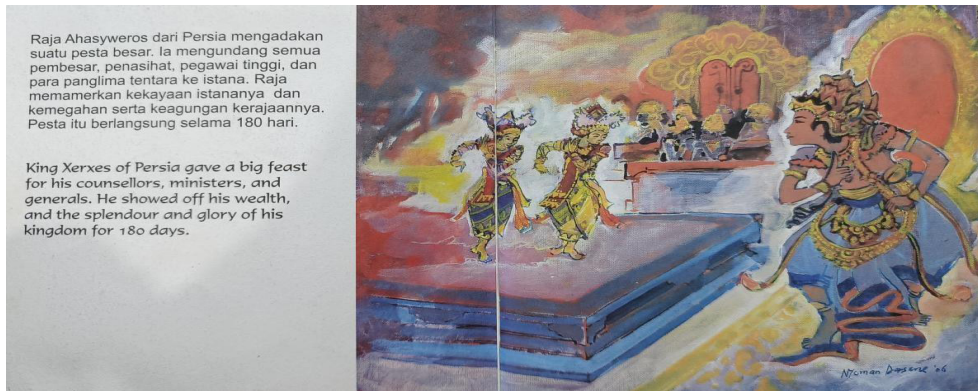
The following section analyzes the visual translation of the Book of Esther into Balinese paintings through the lens of intersemiotic translation. Each narrative episode is examined in terms of its biblical textual context, visual representation, and symbolic-cultural interpretation. By unpacking these visual adaptations scene by scene, this section highlights how sacred narratives are recontextualized through local artistic forms and how meaning is negotiated across linguistic, visual, and cultural modes.

4.1 *King Xerxes' Grand Feast*

4.1.1 *Textual Context*

Based on Esther 1:1–8 (NIV), this passage depicts King Xerxes hosting an extravagant banquet for nobles and officials across his empire. The description emphasizes visual splendor, including fine linens, silver and gold furnishings, and lavish decorations, all of which symbolize Persian grandeur and monarchical power. This display of wealth and authority establishes the political and ceremonial backdrop for the events that follow in the narrative.

The scene highlights Xerxes' performative leadership and the hierarchical spectacle of court life. The tone is majestic and opulent, projecting dominance while foreshadowing deeper tensions within royal power structures.



Picture 1. King Xerxes’ Grand Feast Depicted in Balinese Artistic Style

4.1.2 Visual Interpretation in Balinese Style

As shown in Picture 1, King Xerxes’ grand feast is visually reimagined through the Balinese style, employing symbolic representations of power, ritual, and localized aesthetics (Table 1).

Table 1. Key Visual Features of King Xerxes’ Grand Feast Depicted in Balinese Artistic Style

Visual Feature	Translation Technique	Multimodal Meaning	Interpretive Note
Balinese palace architecture (<i>candi bentar</i> , ornamented structures)	Addition	Representational	Localizes Persian setting using indigenous royal imagery
Traditional Balinese ceremonial attire and golden crowns	Addition	Representational	Substitutes Persian dress with culturally familiar visual symbols
Removal of material references (e.g., alabaster, turquoise)	Reduction	Compositional	Simplifies details for cultural coherence in visual rendering
Centered, commanding depiction of the king	Focalization	Interactive	Highlights power dynamics, aligns with narrative emphasis on majesty
Use of rich color palette: gold, red, blue	Integration	Compositional	Bridges biblical grandeur with Balinese aesthetic tradition

Source: Research Result (2025)

4.1.3 Discussion

1. *Intersemiotic Adaptation Strategies*

This painting employs a combination of reduction, addition, and focalization as identified in Leontovich (2019) and Liang (2023). Reduction is seen in the omission of specific Persian materials, while addition occurs through the localization of costume and architecture. Focalization centers the viewer's attention on King Xerxes as the dominant figure, reinforcing his role in the unfolding narrative.

2. *Multimodal Discourse Construction*

Using the framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), the painting exhibits a strong representational function (replacing foreign elements with familiar ones), an interactive dimension (by making the king confront the viewer with authority), and a compositional logic (via symmetrical layout and culturally loaded color schemes). These layers work together to construct a cohesive visual text that resonates with a Balinese audience. This reflects what Tao & Xie (2023) describe as visual intersemiotic translation, which fosters cultural accessibility by using multi-sensory modes to convey poetic meaning.

3. *Cultural Recontextualization*

The substitution of Persian luxury with Balinese artistic codes not only makes the image accessible to a local audience but also demonstrates the semiotic elasticity of biblical narratives. The royal feast becomes a Balinese ritual celebration, replete with spiritual and aesthetic familiarity, thus expanding the biblical world into new visual-cultural geographies.

This image exemplifies how intersemiotic translation functions not merely as illustration, but as creative reinterpretation, capable of reinforcing theological messages (grandeur, power, divine orchestration) through aesthetic resonance. By visually fusing global sacred text with local sacred form, the painting becomes a testimony to cultural dialogue, enabling viewers to engage with the Bible through their own visual heritage.

4.2 *Queen Vashti's Refusal through Royal Messengers*

4.2.1 *Textual Context*

Drawn from Esther 1:10–12 (NIV), this scene portrays King Xerxes commanding his eunuchs to bring Queen Vashti before the royal guests to display her beauty. Vashti's refusal disrupts expectations, signaling an assertion of personal agency against royal authority. Although the biblical text provides limited commentary, it foregrounds the act of resistance and the role of intermediaries in enacting royal power. The narrative emphasizes Vashti's

autonomy and the hierarchical tension within the court. The tone is defiant and provocative, marking the beginning of the power struggles that shape the broader narrative.



Picture 2. Queen Vashti’s Refusal through Royal Messengers

4.2.2 Visual Interpretation in Balinese Style

Picture 2 reframes Queen Vashti’s refusal scene through Balinese artistic conventions that emphasize harmony, spatial balance, and symbolic femininity. The adaptation employs local visual codes such as ceremonial attire, floral surroundings, and compositional spacing to reinterpret the biblical narrative within the Balinese aesthetic and moral framework. The representation highlights the queen’s autonomy and dignity through gesture and posture, translating the episode’s theme of defiance into a culturally resonant expression of grace, power, and virtue (Table 2).

Table 2. Key Visual Features of Queen Vashti’s Refusal through Royal Messengers

Visual Feature	Translation Technique	Multimodal Meaning	Interpretive Note
Balinese palace courtyard (setting)	Addition	Representational	Spatial layout reinterprets Persian palace into Balinese courtyard with floral motifs.
Queen and messengers in Balinese attire	Addition	Representational	Regal and ceremonial dress codes suggest formality and cultural contextualization.
Body language of messengers and queen	Reduction & Focalization	Interactive	Omits the king’s presence and emphasizes interaction, showing Queen Vashti’s refusal.
Gestural composition and spacing	Focalization	Compositional	Balanced spacing and gaze hierarchy focus attention on Queen Vashti’s autonomy.
Lush natural surroundings and flora	Integration	Representational & Symbolic	Symbolize harmony, power, and femininity within Balinese artistic and cultural values.

Source: Research Result (2025)

4.2.3 Discussion

1. *Intersemiotic Adaptation Strategies*

This image applies a combination of *reduction*, *addition*, *focalization*, and *integration* as outlined in Leontovich (2019) and Liang (2023). *Reduction* is visible in the omission of the King's direct presence and dialogue; instead, the moment is condensed into the interaction between messengers and Queen Vashti. *Addition* involves the insertion of Balinese architectural motifs and symbolic flora to replace Persian courtly elements. *Focalization* shifts narrative emphasis from the King's authority to the Queen's response and the role of intermediaries, inviting the viewer to engage with themes of resistance and diplomacy. *Integration* harmonizes biblical meaning with Balinese imagery, maintaining narrative coherence while embedding local identity.

2. *Multimodal Discourse Construction*

Using the framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), the painting constructs meaning through a rich interplay of visual modes. Representational meaning is conveyed through the depiction of culturally significant elements such as traditional Balinese attire, upright postures, and a locally inspired architectural backdrop, all of which ground the biblical scene within a familiar aesthetic. Interactive meaning emerges through the orientation and gaze of the royal messengers, who are shown facing Queen Vashti with composed expressions and respectful stances, suggesting social deference and reinforcing a sense of formal communication. Compositional meaning is achieved through the careful spatial arrangement that places Queen Vashti at the visual center of the frame, subtly asserting her agency and positioning her as the focal point in a moment of decisive refusal.

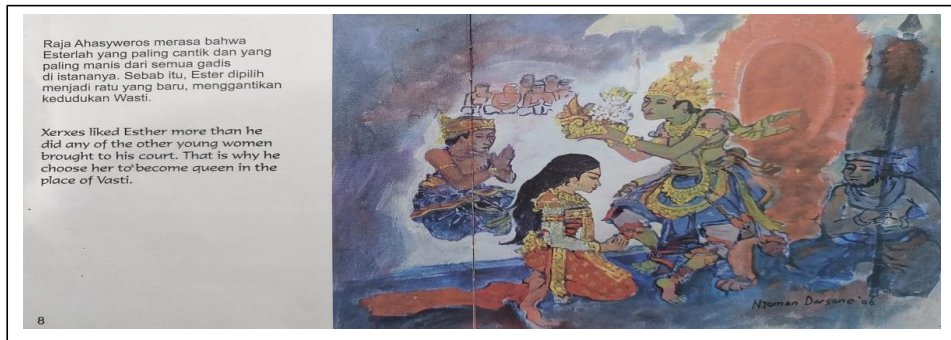
3. *Cultural and Artistic Integration*

Balinese artistic codes not only provide visual richness but also reframe the biblical event as part of a shared cultural heritage. The Queen's refusal, though originally an act of political tension, is transformed into an expression of inner strength and grace, fitting Balinese ideals of refined conduct. The natural environment with blooming flora and soft tones underscores the Queen's harmony with nature and elevates her as a symbol of wisdom and autonomy. This adaptation exemplifies how intersemiotic translation allows narratives to transcend their original context and resonate within new cultural landscapes. As Mowafy (2024) argues that visual signs may "replace, complement, or reconstruct the narrative in culturally specific ways".

4.3 Esther's Coronation

4.3.1 Textual Context

Based on Esther 2:17 (NIV), this passage recounts the moment King Xerxes crowns Esther as queen in place of Vashti. Captivated by her grace and beauty, the king elevates her above all others. While the event marks a royal appointment, it also suggests divine favor, positioning Esther for a greater role in the unfolding narrative of deliverance. The narrative centers on Esther's rise to power and the favor she receives from the king. The tone is solemn yet hopeful, signaling both personal transformation and the foreshadowing of her pivotal role in Israel's salvation.



Picture 3. Esther's Coronation

4.3.2 Visual Interpretation in Balinese Style

Picture 3 depicts Esther's coronation through Balinese artistic reinterpretation, layering visual elements to evoke divine favor, royal grace, and feminine virtue. The adaptation blends symbolic imagery such as the radiant sun, regal gestures, and traditional attire to localize the biblical moment of Esther's elevation. By portraying the queen in a humble kneeling pose before the king, accompanied by a spiritual aura and spatial hierarchy, the image translates themes of divine election and honor into a culturally resonant display of moral beauty, reverence, and divine appointment (Table 3).

Table 3. Key Visual Features of Esther's Coronation

Visual Feature	Translation Technique	Multimodal Meaning	Interpretive Note
Balinese throne and court architecture	Addition	Representational	Replaces Persian palace with Balinese setting; asserts local authority symbolism.
Esther and King in traditional Balinese attire	Addition	Representational	Ceremonial garments align with Balinese royal iconography, showing legitimacy.

Visual Feature	Translation Technique	Multimodal Meaning	Interpretive Note
Esther kneeling, King crowning her	Reduction & Focalization	Interactive & Compositional	Focuses on coronation moment; omits preparatory stages but highlights submission.
Gestures of attendants and divine aura	Integration	Representational (Symbolic Process)	Reinforce reverence, spiritual elevation, and the sacred nature of Esther's role.
Color usage: gold for king, soft tones for Esther	Focalization	Compositional Salience & Hierarchy	Visual hierarchy stresses power and purity; enhances thematic contrast.

Source: Research Result (2025)

4.3.3 Discussion

1. Intersemiotic Adaptation Strategies

This visual retelling applies *reduction* by compressing the selection process into the symbolic act of crowning. The complexities of the king's deliberation are distilled into a single, emotionally resonant moment. Through *addition*, elements such as Balinese regalia, sacred court decor, and ceremonial posture bring the narrative into a localized cultural idiom. *Focalization* centers the interaction between Esther and the King, especially the laying of the crown highlighting Esther's transformation into queen. Finally, *integration* merges biblical and Balinese iconography, preserving narrative coherence while enriching local relevance.

2. Multimodal Discourse Construction

Representational meaning in the painting is conveyed through the depiction of Esther and the King, where elements such as the crown, royal attire, and throne are rendered in traditional Balinese aesthetics. These features reflect local conceptions of leadership and virtue, with Esther portrayed not only as beautiful but also dignified. Interactive meaning is established through their body language: Esther is shown in a humble, deferential posture while the King occupies a higher, more commanding position, constructing a visual hierarchy that mirrors the reverence embedded in the biblical narrative. Compositional meaning arises from the spatial structure of the artwork, where Esther is positioned at the center despite being slightly lower in elevation. This composition emphasizes both her humility and her crucial role in the unfolding events. This balanced visual weight reinforces her narrative importance within the story's pivotal moment.

3. Cultural and Artistic Integration

Balinese court traditions often portray ideal rulers as divinely appointed and spiritually disciplined. Esther's coronation, as imagined through this lens, communicates not only her personal virtue but also her role as a sacred vessel. The image draws on cultural ideals of femininity, grace, and duty, mapping the biblical motif of divine selection onto Balinese traditions of royal investiture. The naturalistic background and stylized ornaments further localize the narrative.

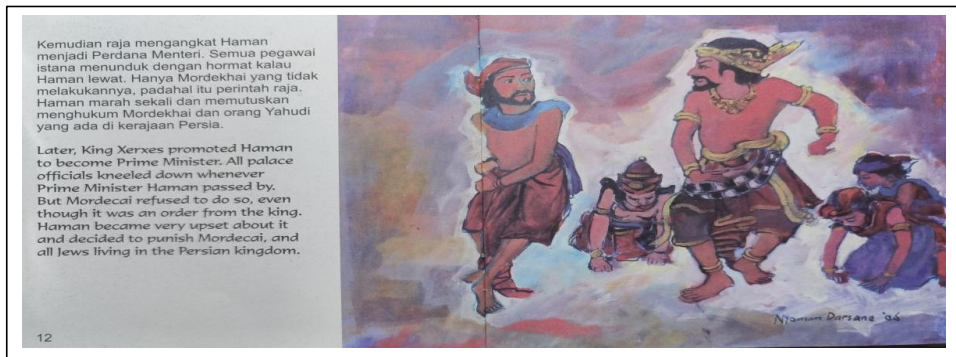
Esther's coronation becomes a moment of symbolic convergence in which biblical values such as favor, destiny, and leadership are re-expressed through Balinese visual and cultural grammar. Intersemiotic translation here does not merely localize but *sacralizes* the story, enabling viewers to engage with Esther as both a biblical and a culturally resonant heroine. This strategic translation invites deeper reflection on how global religious stories are given new life through local lenses.

4.4 Mordecai's Defiance of Haman

4.4.1 Textual Context

Drawn from Esther 3:1–6 (NIV), this passage portrays Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman after his elevation by King Xerxes. Despite a royal command, Mordecai stands firm in his identity and faith as a Jew, prompting Haman to respond with disproportionate anger. What begins as personal offense escalates into a plan for ethnic persecution across the empire.

The narrative highlights Mordecai's integrity in the face of unjust authority and Haman's prideful abuse of power. The tone is tense and ominous, signaling the onset of conflict that will test faith, identity, and justice.



Picture 4. Mordecai's Defiance of Haman

4.4.2 Visual Interpretation in Balinese Style

Picture 4 visualizes the moment of confrontation between Mordecai and Haman through Balinese artistic conventions that emphasize moral resistance,

power asymmetry, and spiritual courage. The image highlights the contrast between Haman’s domineering posture and Mordecai’s upright stance, reinterpreting the biblical conflict as a clash of virtue against oppression. Local cultural codes such as elaborate headdresses, stylized body proportions, and dynamic spatial composition amplify the dramatic tension while embedding the narrative within a Balinese moral and aesthetic worldview. This translation accentuates resistance to unjust authority as an expression of personal integrity and spiritual conviction (Table 4).

Table 4. Key Visual Features of Mordecai’s Defiance of Haman

Visual Feature	Translation Technique	Multimodal Meaning	Interpretive Note
Mordecai standing upright	Reduction	Representational	Compresses narrative tension into Mordecai’s solitary, upright stance symbolizing defiance
Palace attendants kneeling	Addition	Compositional	Highlights cultural adaptation of hierarchy and obedience to Haman
Haman in dominant red tones	Focalization	Compositional	Centers attention on Haman’s anger and pride; red denotes authority and temper
Balinese attire and architecture	Integration	Representational	Localizes the Persian court within Balinese court aesthetics

Source: Research Result (2025)

4.4.3 Discussion

1. *Intersemiotic Adaptation Strategies*

The artwork as shown in Picture 4 employs a combination of reduction, addition, focalization, and symbolic adaptation. Reduction is seen in the omission of broader political implications, focusing instead on the immediate visual confrontation. Addition appears through the inclusion of Balinese architectural motifs and traditional attire. Focalization highlights the interpersonal conflict between Haman and Mordecai, shifting the narrative center away from royal authority to moral resistance. The strategic use of color and elevation through symbolic adaptation visually encodes dominance, defiance, and tension.

2. *Multimodal Discourse Construction*

Within this visual retelling, posture, gesture, and spatial arrangement function as key semiotic modes. Mordecai’s upright stance against the backdrop of kneeling figures establishes a discourse of protest and personal conviction. Haman’s raised hand and intense gaze suggest an imminent assertion of power.

These visual cues construct a rich interpretive narrative in the absence of text, enabling viewers to infer underlying values and emotional weight.

3. *Cultural and Artistic Integration*

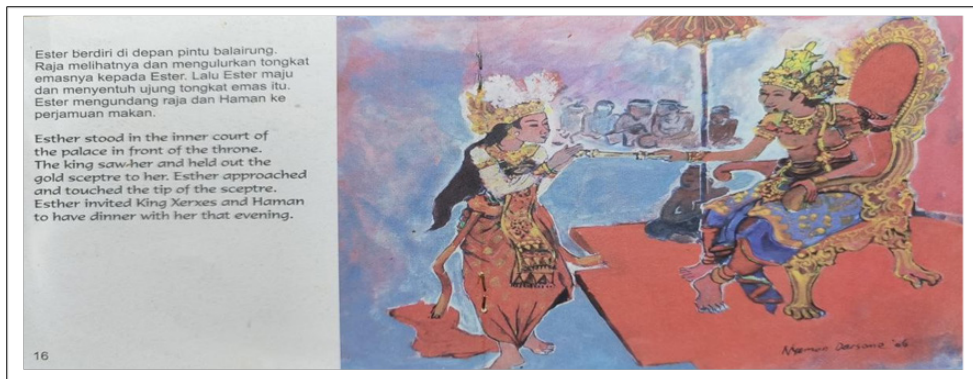
Balinese cultural identity is embedded through the depiction of traditional sarongs, sashes, and royal court design. These elements not only localize the Persian narrative but reframe it within a Balinese socio-cultural lens. Color symbolism, such as red for wrath and authority and earth tones for humility, aligns biblical character archetypes with Balinese symbolic traditions, thereby creating a layered, culturally resonant artwork.

The intersemiotic translation of Mordecai's defiance artfully navigates the intersection between biblical themes and Balinese cultural expression. Through selective visual strategies and cultural localization, the artwork highlights universal concepts of moral courage, injustice, and resistance. The painting stands as a testament to how sacred texts can be reinterpreted through local visual language, enriching both theological discourse and regional artistic heritage.

4.5 *Esther's Courageous Approach to the King*

4.5.1 *Textual Context*

Based on Esther 5:1–2 (NIV), this scene depicts Queen Esther approaching King Xerxes uninvited which is an act that risks death under Persian law. Dressed in royal garments, she enters the inner court, and the king responds by extending his golden scepter, a sign of acceptance and favor. Esther then invites the king and Haman to a banquet, initiating her strategic plan to save her people. The passage emphasizes Esther's courage in facing danger, her strategic initiative, and the king's receptive response. The tone reflects a balance of tension and hope, capturing the risk involved and the unfolding of divine providence.



Picture 5. Esther's Courageous Approach to the King

4.5.2 Visual Interpretation in Balinese Style

Picture 5 visualizes Esther's brave entrance through Balinese court imagery that emphasizes reverence, authority, and divine favor. The extended scepter, Balinese throne, and ceremonial attire localize the scene while underscoring Esther's humility and the king's sovereign power. The image conveys the moment's emotional and theological weight within a culturally familiar aesthetic. Key visual features are as follows (Table 5).

Table 5. Key Visual Features of Esther's Courageous Approach to the King

Visual Feature	Translation Technique	Multimodal Meaning	Interpretive Note
Balinese throne and canopy	Addition	Representational	King Xerxes' royal authority is expressed through Balinese architecture and regalia
Traditional ceremonial attire	Addition	Representational	Esther and Xerxes wear Balinese royal garments, enhancing the scene's local resonance
Esther's kneeling gesture	Focalization	Representational	Symbolizes humility, courage, and respectful diplomacy
Golden scepter and throne colors	Symbolic Adaptation	Compositional	Gold conveys divine favor and authority, visually anchoring the narrative moment
Reduction of palace audience	Reduction	Compositional	Emphasizes the private yet high-stakes encounter between Esther and the king

Source: Research Result (2025)

4.5.3 Discussion

1. Intersemiotic Adaptation Strategies

The adaptation strategically utilizes reduction to isolate the pivotal moment of favor, addition to incorporate Balinese elements, and focalization to guide viewer attention to the symbolic exchange. Symbolic adaptation reinforces meaning through color, attire, and positioning.

2. Multimodal Discourse Construction

Through gesture, attire, and spatial composition, the painting constructs a narrative of faith, diplomacy, and divine providence. Esther's forward movement and submissive gesture contrast with the king's composed authority, visually portraying negotiation under tension.

3. Cultural and Artistic Integration

Balinese visual elements such as the throne, ceremonial dress, and canopy provide a locally grounded lens through which viewers can engage with Esther's act. The adaptation enables biblical themes to be experienced through familiar artistic conventions and spiritual aesthetics.

This adaptation of Esther's brave approach presents a rich fusion of biblical narrative and Balinese cultural identity. It reveals the capacity of intersemiotic translation to preserve theological depth while rendering the story emotionally and culturally accessible. The painting thus becomes both a visual retelling and a spiritual reflection on faith and courage in culturally specific form.

4.6 King Xerxes' Sleepless Night

4.6.1 Textual Context

Based on Esther 6:1 (NIV), this scene portrays a turning point in the narrative, as King Xerxes experiences a restless night and requests the chronicles of his reign to be read aloud. The reading unexpectedly brings to light Mordecai's previously unrewarded act of loyalty. Though seemingly incidental, this moment initiates a reversal of fortune that shifts the story's trajectory. The episode highlights themes of divine providence and the unseen orchestration of justice. The tone is quiet yet anticipatory, suggesting that even minor events can carry transformative consequences within the broader narrative design.



Picture 6. King Xerxes' Sleepless Night

4.6.2 Visual Interpretation in Balinese Style

Picture 6 presents King Xerxes' sleepless night as a contemplative and symbolically charged scene. The painting visualizes a moment of divine orchestration and internal unrest through localized Balinese imagery. The composition integrates traditional furnishings, color symbolism, and narrative elements such as the king's reclined posture and the scroll read aloud to communicate tension, authority, and the impending turn of events. This

interpretive rendering blends spiritual nuance with aesthetic clarity, anchoring the biblical episode within a visually reflective tableau. The following Table 6 outlines the key visual features and their interpretive significance:

Table 6. Key Visual Features of King Xerxes's Sleepless Night

Visual Feature	Translation Technique	Multimodal Meaning	Interpretive Note
King reclining on ornate bed	Addition	Representational	Highlights royal authority and internal unrest through physical posture
Scroll reading by servant	Focalization	Representational	Represents divine revelation and the unveiling of justice
Traditional Balinese furnishings	Addition	Representational	Integrates carved bedposts, table, and jugs with Balinese decorative patterns
Red and gold color scheme	Symbolic Adaptation	Compositional	Red denotes urgency and power; gold connotes authority and fate's turning point
Minimalist composition	Reduction	Compositional	Emphasizes only the king and attendants to distill the key action of the scene

Source: Research Result (2025)

4.6.3 Discussion

1. *Intersemiotic Adaptation Strategies*

The adaptation effectively employs reduction by excluding external references to Mordecai and focusing on the introspective moment of the king. Addition enriches the visual field with distinctly Balinese motifs such as carved wooden furnishings, red-gold ornamentation, and ceremonial layouts noted in the Table 6 while focalization directs attention to the act of reading. Symbolic adaptation is achieved through the strategic use of posture, setting, and warm lighting.

2. *Multimodal Discourse Construction*

The painting constructs its discourse through posture (reclining, cross-armed king), gaze (attentive servant), and spatial layering (foregrounded bed and scroll). The storytelling unfolds not through grand action, but through the quiet drama of discovery. Visual cues function as narrative devices that build suspense and signal providential intervention.

3. Cultural and Artistic Integration

Balinese stylistics such as wood-carved furniture, ceremonial textiles, and spatial arrangement dominate the scene's aesthetic, offering familiar artistic language to Balinese viewers. This enhances reception and cultural ownership of the story, enabling local theological reflection through visual literacy.

This adaptation of Esther 6:1 situates a pivotal biblical moment within a culturally recognizable setting, demonstrating how divine orchestration can be visually embedded in local forms. The painting becomes both an interpretive re-telling and a cultural bridge, showing how intersemiotic translation extends narrative depth while cultivating spiritual and artistic resonance in new contexts.

4.7 Haman's Execution and Mordecai's Promotion

4.7.1 Textual Context

Drawn from Esther 7:10 and 8:2 (NIV), this climactic episode depicts the ultimate reversal of fate: Haman is executed on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, and Mordecai is honored with the king's signet ring and appointed over Haman's estate. This decisive turn marks the resolution of the narrative conflict, in which the oppressed are vindicated and the oppressor is judged. The scene underscores themes of justice, power reversal, and moral vindication. The tone is resolute and triumphant, affirming the restoration of order and divine intervention at a critical juncture in the story.



Picture 7. Haman's Execution and Moerdecai's Promotion

4.7.2 Visual Interpretation in Balinese Style

Picture 7 illustrates a pivotal moment of reversal, blending Balinese artistic conventions with biblical narrative to depict both judgment and restoration. The scene reinterprets royal justice and divine intervention through the lens of local iconography—elaborate costumes, hierarchic composition, and ceremonial space. Mordecai's bow before the king symbolizes reverent

submission, while the surrounding figures and objects mark the transition from violence to vindication. The image emphasizes moral order and divine orchestration, offering a culturally resonant tableau of triumph over injustice.

Table 7. Key Visual Features of Haman’s Execution and Moerdecai’s Promotion

Visual Element	Translation Technique	Multimodal Meaning	Interpretive Significance
Mordecai bowing before the king	Focalization	Interactive	Emphasizes Mordecai’s reverence and acceptance of authority after divine vindication
King extending his hand with a ring	Symbolic Adaptation	Representational	Represents the king’s formal appointment and the conferral of trust and leadership
Balinese ceremonial costumes	Addition	Representational	Mordecai and the king wear traditional Balinese attire, visually grounding the story in Bali
Royal court with intricate ornamentation	Integration	Representational	The Balinese-style throne and palace setting reflects legitimacy, hierarchy, and sacred space
Absence of execution imagery	Reduction	Compositional	Omits the violent aspect of the story to focus on restoration, aligning with local sensitivities

Source: Research Result (2025)

4.7.3 Discussion

1. *Intersemiotic Adaptation Strategies*

This visual adaptation applies several intersemiotic translation strategies. Through reduction, the image omits the depiction of Haman’s execution, focusing instead on the aftermath of justice. Addition is employed to incorporate traditional Balinese costumes and court design, effectively embedding the scene within the local cultural framework. Focalization centers the viewer’s attention on the relational dynamic between the king and Mordecai. Symbolic adaptation enhances narrative meaning through the deliberate use of royal gestures and symbols.

2. *Multimodal Discourse Construction*

The painting constructs meaning through posture (Mordecai bowing, the king extending his hand), attire (elaborate Balinese garments), and spatial

hierarchy (Mordecai lower than the king). These visual elements reinforce the themes of justice, humility, and divine appointment. The gesture of ring-giving serves as both a political and symbolic act within the visual discourse.

3. *Cultural and Artistic Integration*

This image exemplifies successful cultural and artistic integration. The use of Balinese color palettes (vibrant blues, reds, and golds), spatial composition (centralized throne, formal gesture), and symbolic artifacts (the ring, the throne) bridges the biblical message with local artistic expression. The result is a culturally resonant scene that retains theological depth.

This final scene offers a powerful conclusion to the narrative arc of the Book of Esther. Through visual storytelling rooted in Balinese culture, the painting reinterprets the message of justice and divine reversal in a way that is both locally meaningful and globally relevant. The intersemiotic strategies of reduction, addition, focalization, and symbolic adaptation contribute to a holistic and culturally grounded portrayal of biblical justice and triumph.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined how the *Book of Esther* is semantically and visually adapted into Balinese paintings, illustrating how biblical narratives are transformed across semiotic modes and cultural boundaries. Through close analysis of selected scenes, the study identified key intersemiotic translation techniques such as reduction, addition, focalization, and symbolic adaptation, which collectively mediate the textual meanings of the Bible into locally resonant visual forms. Key findings include:

- a. *Cultural Localization* - The paintings successfully integrate Balinese elements such as traditional dress, architectural motifs, and ceremonial settings into the biblical narratives. This localization enables viewers to engage with the story through familiar cultural symbols, reinforcing the adaptability of biblical themes within diverse cultural frameworks.
- b. *Visual Simplification* - The use of reduction allows the artists to focus on pivotal characters or actions by omitting minor details from the original text. This technique does not diminish the narrative but instead amplifies its emotional and moral essence through concentrated visual storytelling.
- c. *Symbolic Emphasis* - Through strategic use of color, posture, and composition, the paintings highlight universal values such as justice, humility, courage, and divine intervention. These symbolic choices resonate with both the source text and Balinese visual tradition, creating a layered and meaningful representation.

- d. *Narrative Focus and Emotional Framing* - The technique of focalization centers on crucial narrative turning points and emotional tension, directing the viewer's attention to the core message. This results in a visually simplified but morally potent depiction that maintains thematic fidelity to the biblical account.
- e. *Imperfect Equivalence and Interpretive Creativity* - In line with Holubenko's (2023) theory of imperfect equivalence in intersemiotic translation, this study acknowledges that translation across different modes, particularly from verbal to visual, inevitably involves acts of reinterpretation. The shift from textual narration to painted scenes entails cognitive, emotional, and cultural decisions, making the translation outcome dynamic rather than fixed. Techniques such as reduction and addition demonstrate that some elements are transformed or omitted not due to oversight but as a necessary response to modal and cultural shifts. This highlights the creative agency of the translator-artist and the evolving nature of meaning-making across semiotic systems.

By engaging with both biblical fidelity and local artistic expression, the paintings not only retell the story of Esther but also offer a unique interpretive lens rooted in Balinese culture. This study contributes to the field of intersemiotic translation by showcasing how sacred narratives can be reimagined in culturally grounded visual forms, enriching their interpretive potential and fostering cross-cultural theological literacy. By extending intersemiotic translation theories to traditional Southeast Asian visual art, this study highlights how indigenous aesthetics can reshape the global circulation of sacred narratives.

AI Disclosure Statement

Artificial intelligence tools (ChatGPT 5.2) were used to assist in language editing and manuscript refinement. All conceptualization, analysis, and interpretation remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

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