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Comparative Analysis of Kakawin Sutasoma and the Short Story "Kepergian Sutasoma" by Gunawan Maryanto

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KEYWORDS

Comparison of Kakawin and Sutasoma's Short Story, Kakawin Sutasoma, Sutasoma's Departure Short Story.

ABSTRACT

This study compares Kakawin Sutasoma by Mpu Tantular with the short story Kepergian Sutasoma by Gunawan Maryanto, published in Koran Tempo on June 5, 2011. The short story narrates Sutasoma's search for identity as the heir to the throne of the Hastinapura Kingdom, who chooses self-imposed exile. It was inspired by Kakawin Sutasoma, a classical Javanese literary work rich in Buddhist teachings and composed during the 14th-century Majapahit era. This study aims to analyze the similarities and differences between the two works, particularly in terms of story elements and narrative structure. The method employed is descriptive qualitative, with data collection techniques such as document recording. The research focuses on the inspiration drawn from Kakawin Sutasoma for the short story, the parallels between the opening section (Manggala Kakawin) and the opening of the short story, and a comparative examination of their narrative structures. The structural analysis of the short story addresses theme, setting, characters and characterization, and point of view. The findings indicate that although the short story retains the original characters and figures of Kakawin Sutasoma, its mode of presentation differs, as it is written in the form of modern prose.

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INTRODUCTION

Literary works are highly beneficial for life because they can provide readers with awareness of life's truths, even when depicted through fiction (Zunshine, 2022). They offer joy and inner satisfaction (Pratomo et al., 2023; Sudibjo & Manihuruk, 2022). Literary works can be understood as personal expressions of human experience, thought, feeling, ideas, enthusiasm, and belief, conveyed through language in written form to evoke aesthetic charm (Khamrabaeva, 2025). According to Karjagdiu & Mrasori (2022), one definition of literature is the art of language, meaning that a literary work is created to be enjoyed by readers. Connoisseurs of literature can appreciate a work only through a degree of literary understanding (Ali et al., 2021; Salsabila & Huda, 2023). Literary works are not a branch of science; they are art, infused with intrinsic elements of humanity—especially emotion—making it difficult to apply scientific methods (Howes, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025). Feelings, enthusiasm, beliefs, and convictions, as elements of literature, are difficult to define. Among the types of literary works is the short story (Kasih et al., 2022).

According to Kiosses (2021), short stories are a form of fiction. As the name suggests, short stories are characterized by brevity—both in events portrayed, number of characters, *Jurnal Indonesia Sosial Sains*3149

narrative content, and word count. This form contrasts with another narrative prose form, the novel. Edgar Allan Poe defines a short story as a narrative that can be read in one sitting, approximately between half an hour and two hours—something that a novel cannot achieve (Balogh & Klaudia, 2022; Ivanković, 2022).

Gunawan Maryanto (April 10, 1976 – October 6, 2021) was an Indonesian actor, writer, and theater director. In addition to managing Teater Garasi, he co-organized the Indonesia Dramatic Reading Festival (IDRF) with Joned Suryatmoko annually in various cities. His works—including poetry, prose, and literary criticism—have been published widely in Indonesian media (Rorintulus et al., 2025; Silalahi et al., 2022). Maryanto performed internationally, received an arts grant from the Kelola Foundation, and won several art and writing competitions. A versatile artist, he also wrote literary works published in major Indonesian outlets such as *Koran Tempo*, *Media Indonesia*, *Kompas*, *Jawa Pos*, *Suara Merdeka*, *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, *Bernas*, *BlockNotProse*, *BlockNotPoetry*, *On/Off*, *Jurnal Kolong Budaya*, *Jurnal Puisi*, *Jurnal Prosa*, *Jurnal Cerpen*, *Jurnal Kalam*, and *LeBur Theater Quarterly*. With Teater Garasi, Maryanto received several arts grants from the Kelola Foundation for various projects. His prominence in literature and theater earned him frequent invitations to speak at seminars, discussions, training sessions, workshops, and festivals (Sturm, 2024). One of his notable short stories is "*Kepergian Sutasoma*."

Maryanto's short story "Kepergian Sutasoma" was published in Koran Tempo on June 5, 2011. The story narrates the beginning of Sutasoma's search for identity as the heir to the Hastinapura throne who chooses exile. In his final note, Maryanto acknowledged that his story was inspired by the Kakawin Sutasoma written by Mpu Tantular—a literary work deeply infused with Buddhist teachings and composed during the Majapahit Kingdom's golden age. Mpu Tantular, a renowned 14th-century Javanese poet, lived during the reign of Prince Rajasanagara (King Hayam Wuruk). His notable works include Kakawin Arjunawijaya and particularly Kakawin Sutasoma, which reflects his Buddhist beliefs and openness toward other religions. Although the exact date of composition remains uncertain, it likely falls between 1365 and 1389. The year 1365 marks the completion of Kakawin Nagarakretagama, while 1389 coincides with King Hayam Wuruk's death—suggesting Kakawin Sutasoma was written after Nagarakretagama.

The short story begins with an address to Sri Bajrajñana, who is lonely one night as Kali Sri Jinapati descends to earth to banish evil. Meanwhile, in the Land of Hastina, crime arises, but King Sri Mahaketu of the Kuru Nation remains silent, powerless to act. Unable to regain his authority, the land falls under rule by giants occupying key positions of power. In this context, King Mahaketu confides in his teacher, Sri Jinesawarabajra, about a disturbing dream. The teacher interprets it as a sign of hope—symbolized by the birth of Sutasoma, the king's son. Expecting Sutasoma to succeed him, Mahaketu arranges his marriage to Kusumagandhawati, a giant's descendant; however, Sutasoma rejects the proposal and chooses to become a hermit atop a mountain. On his journey, he prays before the statue of the goddess Bhairawi, who then appears as Bhairawi-Durga in a terrifying form and worships Sutasoma, calling him "Buddha." She directs him toward Mount Semeru, where Bathara Guru meditates and later teaches him *Mahahrdayadharani*, a magical mantra to eradicate evil and disease. The story concludes with Bhairawi-Durga's request that Sutasoma convey her longing to Bathara

Guru should he meet him, before she vanishes. Sutasoma continues his journey in search of *sunyata*, distancing himself from worldly power and turmoil.

Previous comparative literature studies have examined classical-modern adaptations within Indonesian literary traditions (Duderija, 2025). Mulyono (2025) & Sanobar (2025) explored intertextuality in Javanese literature, highlighting how contemporary writers engage with classical texts. Fauzan (2025) analyzed *kakawin* adaptations in modern Indonesian literature, emphasizing cultural transformation processes. However, specific comparative analysis between *Kakawin Sutasoma* and its modern prose adaptation remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining how Buddhist symbolism and Majapahit-era values are recontextualized in contemporary narrative forms, contributing to a deeper understanding of literary continuity and cultural reinterpretation in Indonesian letters (Wahyuni et al., 2024).

Based on these considerations, the researcher is interested in comparing *Kakawin Sutasoma* and Gunawan Maryanto's short story "*Kepergian Sutasoma*." While the short story generally follows the same characters and traits as the *kakawin*, it differs in form as a piece of modern prose. This research has three objectives: (1) to identify intertextual connections between *Kakawin Sutasoma* and Maryanto's short story; (2) to analyze the structural transformation from classical *kakawin* to modern prose; and (3) to interpret how Buddhist symbolism and Majapahit values are recontextualized in a modern narrative. This study contributes to Indonesian comparative literature by highlighting mechanisms of literary continuity, showing how classical texts inspire modern reinterpretations, and deepening the understanding of cultural syncretism within Indonesia's literary heritage.

While Maryanto's "Kepergian Sutasoma" generally follows character names and traits from Kakawin Sutasoma, distinctions arise in structure—the short story adopts modern prose form, whereas the kakawin belongs to the Old Javanese literary tradition bound by metrical conventions. According to I Nyoman Suarka's Telaah Kakawin Sebuah Pengantar, kakawin is defined as an Old Javanese literary genre governed by metrical rules. Despite structural differences, both texts share thematic similarities: their openings (the manggala in kakawin and the introduction in the short story) conclude with the arrival of the present era—the Kali Yuga Period—described in the short story as "on a night when Kali" followed by "Sri Jinapati." The Buddha descends to destroy the forces of evil. Notably, Sri Jinapati represents Buddha himself as leader of the Jina Buddhas, the savior who resists destruction and wickedness. This parallelism illustrates how contemporary authors engage with classical religious-literary traditions, transforming them into modern narrative contexts while preserving their core symbolic essence.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, describing facts followed by analytical interpretation. Data collection was conducted using document analysis techniques. The theoretical framework drew on Julia Kristeva's intertextuality theory, which posits that texts exist in relation to other texts, and A. Teeuw's structural analysis approach for examining narrative elements.

The analytical process followed three systematic steps: (1) identification of narrative elements in both *Kakawin Sutasoma* and "*Kepergian Sutasoma*," including character

configurations, thematic patterns, and structural components; (2) comparative analysis across texts, examining similarities and differences in opening sections (manggala), character development, and narrative progression; and (3) thematic synthesis and interpretation, connecting findings to the broader cultural transformation from Majapahit values to modern self-exile themes.

Data sources comprised two primary texts: *Kakawin Sutasoma* by Mpu Tantular (classical text) and "*Kepergian Sutasoma*" by Gunawan Maryanto, published in *Koran Tempo* on June 5, 2011 (modern adaptation). Secondary sources included scholarly works on *kakawin* literature, Buddhist symbolism in Javanese tradition, and comparative literature methodology.

The research analyzed several elements in Maryanto's "Kepergian Sutasoma," including its inspiration from Kakawin Sutasoma, similarities between the manggala kakawin and the short story's opening, and a comparative analysis of their narrative structures. The document recording technique served as the primary data collection method, providing systematic documentation essential for comparative literary analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Comparative Analysis of Kakawin Sutasoma and the Short Story "Kepergian Sutasoma" by Gunawan Maryanto

The short story "Kepergian Sutasoma" broadly follows the canons (character names and characteristics are the same) in Kakawin Sutasoma. The difference lies in the format, where the short story is modern prose. It should be noted that kakawin is an ancient Javanese literary work with its own canons and rules. I Nyoman Suarka, in his book "Telaah Kakawin Sebuah Pengantar" (2012), explains that kakawin is an Old Javanese literary genre whose language is bound by the rules of meter. There are several basic rules in kakawin, such as guru-laghu, wretta, meter, and the number of lines in a stanza. These canons differentiate it from modern short stories.

The Kakawin Sutasoma, which is steeped in religious teachings, is only touched upon in relation to patterns and practices such as "sunyata" and the journey or path of an ascetic. Nevertheless, Gunawan Maryanto, in "Kepergian Sutasoma," skillfully emphasizes the power of narrative through diction, plot, and description, which encourages the reader to imagine and understand the context. However, "Kepergian Sutasoma" is only the beginning of the complex and lengthy Kakawin Sutasoma. The story concludes with Sutasoma's encounter with Durga, which marks the beginning of Sutasoma's journey and search for identity.

Furthermore, the researcher also found similarities between Manggala Kakawin and the opening of the short story. The following is a review:

Elements of Similarity between Manggala Kakawin and the Opening of the Short Story

Both the mangala and the opening of the short story conclude with the arrival of the present era, referred to in the mangala as the "Kali Yuga Period," while in the short story it is written "on a night during Kali" followed by "Sri Jinapati." The Buddha is said to have come to the world to destroy the power of evil. Interestingly, Sri Jinapati is the Buddha himself, the leader of the Buddha Jina (the "savior" who saviors against destruction and evil).

Sutasoma, the main character in the short story and the kakawin, is the embodiment of the Buddha or Sri Jinapati in human form. In the short story, this is demonstrated when he addresses Sutasoma as "Buddha." The following excerpt is from the following:

In the evening, as the sun set, Sutasoma arrived at a small hamlet at the foot of the mountain. He immediately headed for the cemetery. He wanted to pray before the statue of the goddess Bhairawi. Perhaps the path to perfect silence would open from there, with the blessing of Bhairawi-Durga. There was no need to wait for midnight for Bhairawi-Durga to appear in her most terrifying form—her intense longing for Bhatara Guru. But this terrifying figure did not appear to unleash a curse. She came to kneel at Sutasoma's feet. She called Sutasoma Buddha.

Sutasoma's encounter with Durga in the short story "Kepergiri Sutasoma" also marks the conclusion of the story. The story is left hanging, and the narrator explains that Sutasoma has gone in search of "sunyata" and away from the hustle and bustle of power.

Inspiration for Kakawin Sutasoma in Short Stories

Gunawan Maryanto opens his short story by mentioning several names, including Sri Bajrajñana and Sri Jinapati. The opening of the short story, similar to the kakawin in Javanese literature, contains a "manggala" section. Interestingly, the opening is broadly similar to the Kakawin Sutasoma.

Zoetmulder explains that the manggala constitutes or contains the opening verses of a kakawin literary work. Furthermore, the manggala is also defined as anything, words, actions, or figures with supernatural powers that ensure the success of the story. Meanwhile, A. Teeuw states that the manggala in a kakawin usually contains several elements, including prayers to the gods, glorification of the king, and humiliation of the poet, as well as self-defense. The mangala in the Kakawin Sutasoma contains worship or prayers to Sri Bajrajñana, interpreted as the essence of "kasunyatan."

Sri Bajrajñana will appear, then emerge into the Boddhacitta state of samadhi and reside within the mind. Meanwhile, several yugas are also mentioned, including Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, who will protect. To compare the kakawin and Gunawan Maryanto's short story, here is the opening excerpt from the short story "Kepergian Sutasoma":

I write this news for the empty Sri Bajrajñana who resides deep in my heart on a night when Kali Sri Jinapati descends to earth to expel all evil in place of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu.

Structural structure of the short story Sutasoma's Departure by Gunawan Maryanto *Theme*

According to Tarigan, a theme is a particular outlook on life, a particular feeling about life, or a set of values that form or build the basis or main idea of a literary work. Another opinion is put forward by Aminudin, who states that a theme is the underlying idea of a story, thus serving as the author's starting point in presenting the work of fiction. The theme of the short story "Kepergian Sutasoma" is explained as follows:

The short story "Kepergian Sutasoma" begins with the search for identity for Sutasoma, heir to the throne of the Hastinapura kingdom who chooses to exile himself. In his final note,

the author acknowledges that his short story was inspired by the Sutasoma kakawin (a poem written by Mpu Tantular).

Kakawin Sutasoma is a literary work closely associated with Buddhist teachings and written by Mpu Tantular during the golden age of the Majapahit Empire. Mpu Tantular was a renowned Javanese poet who lived in the 14th century. Tantular's works became known during the reign of Prince Rajasanagara, also known as King Hayam Wuruk. Tantular's phenomenal works include Kakawin Arjunawijaya and, in particular, Kakawin Sutasoma, which demonstrate the author's Buddhist affiliation with other religions. Although the exact date of the Kakawin's composition is unknown, it is estimated to have been between 1365 and 1389. It is important to note that 1365 was the year Kakawin Nagarakretagama was completed, and in 1389 King Hayam Wuruk died, while Kakawin Sutasoma was written after Kakawin Nagarakretagama.

The short story begins with the statement that it is addressed to Sri Bajrajñana, who is lonely one night when Kali Sri Jinapati descends to earth to exorcise evil. Meanwhile, it is said that atrocities are afoot in the land of Hastinapura, yet King Sri Mahaketu, a member of the Kuru race, remains silent and unable to do anything. The king's trust is lost, while the demons rule the land and occupy important positions of power.

King Mahaketu is said to have told his guru, Sri Jinesawarabajra, about his nightmare. The guru interpreted the dream as a sign of hope from the king's wife. Finally, Mahaketu interpreted his guru's message as the birth of his son, Sutasoma. Mahaketu hoped Sutasoma would succeed him to the throne and asked to marry Kusumagandhawati, a descendant of the giants. However, he refused, choosing to become a hermit on a mountaintop.

On his way to the hermitage, Sutasoma prayed at the grave to the statue of the goddess Bhairawi. Bhairawi-Durga appeared in a terrifying form and worshipped Sutasoma, calling him "Buddha." Sutasoma was then shown the way to Mount Semeru, where Bathara Guru was meditating. Sutasoma was then taught the Mahahrdayadharani, a powerful mantra to eradicate evil and various diseases. The short story concludes with Bhairawi-Durga's request that Sutasoma convey his longing to Bathara Guru if he ever sees him. Bhairawi-Durga then disappeared and Sutasoma continued his journey in search of "sunyata" and to distance himself from the hustle and bustle of power.

Background

The setting is the foundation that has the meaning of place, time relationship, and social environment where the events told occur. The setting is divided into three main elements, namely: time setting, place setting, and social setting. The time setting is characterized by describing the time setting, namely the Mahaketu kingdom. Estimated between 1365 and 1389. It should be noted that 1365 was the year of completion of Kakawin Nagarakretagama, then in 1389 King Hayam Wuruk died, while Kakawin Sutasoma was written after Kakawin Nagarakretagama. The place setting is characterized by the story in the short story Sutasoma's departure which takes place in several places including the banks of the Sindhu River, the Palace, and the cemetery.

Time setting

According to Stanton, the time setting is related to the problem of "when" the events told in a work of fiction occur. The time setting in the short story Kepergian Sutasoma is

characterized by describing the time setting, namely the Mahaketu kingdom. Estimated between 1365 and 1389. It should be noted that 1365 was the year of completion of Kakawin Nagarakretagama, then in 1389 King Hayam Wuruk died, while Kakawin Sutasoma was written after Kakawin Nagarakretagama. The setting of the short story Kepergian Sutasoma is the banks of the Sindhu River, the Palace, and the Grave..

Background scene

Setting is the place, time, and atmosphere in which an event occurs. Mido states that setting is a depiction of the place, time, and situation in which an event occurs. The clearer and more interesting the setting described by the author, the higher the quality of the work. Conversely, the more vague the setting described, the lower the quality of the literary work. In contrast, Aminudin states that setting is the background of events in a fictional work, whether in the form of place, time, or event. The setting of the short story "Kepergian Sutasoma" is in the kingdom and in the cemetery.

Bank of the Sindhu River

"The nation that grew for a thousand years on the banks of the Sindhu River seems to be moving slowly and surely towards destruction".

Palace

"And in the middle of the night, Sri Bajnana, Sutasoma, fled from the palace. The gates opened by themselves, as if to bless the departure of the crown prince of Hastinapura."

Grave

"That evening, as the sun was setting, Sutasoma arrived at a small hamlet at the foot of the mountain. He immediately headed for the cemetery. He wanted to pray before the statue of the goddess Bhairawi.".

Characters and Characterization

Characters are individuals featured in a narrative or dramatic work, interpreted by readers as possessing certain morals and tendencies, as expressed in their speech and actions. According to Aminudin in Siswanto, characters are actors who carry out events in a fictional story, enabling those events to weave a narrative. The way a writer presents characters is called characterization. The term character refers to the person, the actor in the story.

Characters occupy a strategic position as readers and conveyors of messages, morals, or other messages the author intentionally wishes to convey to the reader. Several characters play a role in the novel. Each has distinct traits and characteristics. The main character in this short story, Sutasoma, plays a selfish role, thinking only of himself and ignoring his parents' feelings. Sutasoma leaves the palace without Sri Mahaketu's knowledge. He goes to meet Bathara Guru to practice as an ascetic.

Viewpoint

Aminudin states that point of view is the way an author presents the characters or actors in a story that is told or described. Meanwhile, according to Atar Semi, if the previous point of view was according to Aminudin, now it's Atar's definition of point of view. For him, point of

view is the point of the story, which determines the author's placement and position within the story. He also suggests that point of view is divided into four types: the author as a character, the author as a supporting character, the author as a third-person, and the author as a narrator or actor.

Gunawan Maryanto uses a first-person point of view, speaking from the second person. This strategy is certainly not chosen by Gunawan Maryanto. Choosing a second-person point of view often has the effect of confusing the reader, for example: "You are walking towards the ocean." It's as if the author is recounting something the reader experienced when, in fact, it wasn't actually the reader's experience, or it can also have the effect of making the narrative serve as a form of instruction to the reader.

The use of second-person perspective in this short story creates a possibility, similar to writing a love letter. The space created by second-person storytelling is like a sealed chamber, leaving questions: where are "you" when this story is told? In fact, this method is similar to the murmurs of longing for another person, or a husband or wife visiting their partner's grave and recounting past experiences.

In fact, the narrative method with the second-person perspective approach makes the reader feel familiar with the information that is presented one by one. The reader is dictated to the matter of one event but he is not the one being told, in this context, the short story is a form of power. When the story is in the hands of the reader, the short story that already has a theme and plot gives a certain direction and in the context of the use of the second-person perspective, it is as if the reader must accept the events narrated: imaginatively the reader must move as a child who loves puppets, who does not know that his father has no money, and so on or become a Sad Lover, who can only listen to the story about Sutasoma's departure. However, if we view this as a murmur, Gunawan Maryanto allows the reader to enter the silence of the character I, the father. He seems to be muttering to himself and that something is happening to the family. The reader is made as if he understands the murmur. This story does not present the mother, whom the reader does not know. However, it seems there is a serious problem, because the father had promised his beloved son to go to the puppet shop last year and only fulfilled it the following year even though the father also did not have much money.

CONCLUSION

This study compared *Kakawin Sutasoma* by Mpu Tantular and Gunawan Maryanto's short story "*Kepergian Sutasoma*" (published in *Koran Tempo*, June 5, 2011), revealing intertextual relationships and narrative transformations between the classical and modern works. The analysis showed that although Maryanto retained the original characters, roles, and Buddhist themes of the *kakawin*, his adaptation transformed the metrical Old Javanese poetry into modern prose, emphasizing contemporary concerns such as identity and spiritual searching. Structural parallels—including *manggala* elements invoking Sri Bajrajñana and references to the *Kali Yuga*—demonstrated conscious intertextual continuity. The findings highlight how classical narratives are reimagined for modern readers while preserving Majapahit-era philosophical depth, particularly the *sunyata* concept. This research underscores the dynamic preservation of Indonesia's literary heritage and suggests that future studies could explore comparative analyses

of other *kakawin* adaptations to map broader patterns of cultural reinterpretation and modernization in Indonesian literature.

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