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# The representation of cultural and moral values in the legend of *Pulo Kemaro* and *Romeo & Juliet*: A comparative literary review

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**Abstract:** *This research is a comparative literature study that aims to compare moral values, cultural values and character in decision-making of the character Tan Bun Ann in the legend of Pulo Kemaro and the character of Romeo in the play Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare. This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to comparative literary studies. The research data is in the form of words, sentences, dialogues, narratives, actions, and events that describe the characters, conflicts, decision-making, and consequences experienced by the two characters. Data collection is carried out through reading and recording techniques, then the data is analyzed by identifying the characters and actions of the characters in dealing with conflicts and comparing their similarities and differences. The results of the study show that the Legend of Pulo Kemaro and Romeo and Juliet have similarities in presenting conflicts of relationships between characters that are influenced by the social and cultural environment, but represent different cultural backgrounds. Cultural values in the Legend of Pulo Kemaro are seen through the meeting of Palembang and Chinese cultures and their relationship with Kemaro Island and Hok Tjing Bio, while in Romeo and Juliet it is seen through the position of the Montague and Capulet families in the social life of the characters. The moral values in both works are seen through the actions, decisions, loyalty, emotional control, and consequences experienced by the characters in dealing with conflicts.*

***Keywords:*** *Pulau Kemaro, Romeo & Juliet, cultural values, moral values.*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country rich in culture in every part of its territory. This culture can be expressed through pen ink, and can also be poured orally for several generations until now, which is referred to as literary works. Literature is a human or individual essay that uses language as a medium to express concepts, thoughts, and feelings (Sayogha & Rahmaputri, 2023). There are thousands or even millions of literary works in Indonesia with different genres, even regarding the history that forms the archipelago known today. In the literary treasures in Indonesia, literature is divided into oral literature and written literature (Maulana et al., 2023). Oral literature is produced from speech with a beautiful form of rules by storing cultural and educational elements in society (Febria & Piliang, 2025). Oral literature has an important role in Indonesia, which is rich in culture that contains historical and moral values. Tradition says that oral literature functions as a tool for understanding the values of human life which are usually used as a reference, both in terms of exchanging speech and attitudes in accordance with the rules that exist in society (Dwipayana, 2023). Not only in Indonesia, countries and even in other parts of the continent are also competing to create their own literary works, both oral and written. Discussing literary arts and culture is a

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significant thing in the essence of a country (Budiarsa, 2025).

Of the many literary works in Indonesia, both oral and written, one of the most famous oral literary works is the Legend of Kemaro Island which originated from Palembang, South Sumatra. Palembang's strategic geographical position on the banks of the Musi River makes Palembang a successful city through the main trade routes in Southeast Asia, even since the time of the Srivijaya Kingdom and the Sultanate of Palembang Darussalam at that time (Darosan et al., 2025). Kemaro Island is one of the islands in Palembang, the island holds many stories and history from time to time. The story is immortalized through folklore which has now been poured out in oral form and then inherited by means of modern theater dramas. The story of the Legend of Pulo Kemaro is very closely related to Palembang culture, especially the wedding customs in Palembang. Palembang traditional marriage is one of the wedding traditions in the archipelago that is closely related to Malay-Palembang cultural values and Islamic fatwas. (Fauzan & Hasan, 2025). However, a marriage that is supposed to be happy ends tragically because of misunderstandings and rash nature of a character. The ending of this story is almost similar to the story of a place called Verona, Italy which is famous for Romeo and Juliet.

Based on the similarities of the two stories, the author finds a gap to study by conducting comparative literature studies to become evaluation material by looking at existing shortcomings, advantages, differences, and similarities. Comparative literature is one of the studies of science that serves to analogize more than just one literary work (Muriyana, 2022). Some previous studies that discuss comparative literature are as follows. The first study from Crystovani & Ahmadi (2025) examined the comparison of social reality between the novel The Darkest Side of Heaven by Brian Khrisna and the novel Mines Along the Road by Shahnon using comparative literary studies with a literary sociology approach. The next research from Firmansyah & Zulyeno (2024) which focuses on comparative literary studies between the folklore of Timun Mas from Indonesia and the folktale entitled Kaguyahime No Monogatari from Japan is complemented by using the Feminism approach. The latest research from Adelia & Dewi (2024) which describes the difference in the moral value of life contained in the novel The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran and the Valley of the Soul by Buya Hamka in a review of intertextual elements in comparative literature studies. These studies do examine comparative literature, while this study focuses on comparing character actions in the two stories in different countries to see similarities and differences in character actions in dealing with conflicts and consequences arising from actions taken.

Based on this description, this study focuses on a comparative literary study of the Legend of Pulo Kemaro and William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Comparisons are made to identify similarities and differences in cultural values and moral values contained in the two works. This research aims to find out how cultural values and moral values are represented in the two works and compare the similarities and differences based on different cultural backgrounds. Thus, this research is expected to provide an overview of the cultural values and moral values contained in the two literary works.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Comparative Literature*

Comparative literature is a study that compares two or more literary works to find similarities and differences contained in them. Comparative literature is an interdisciplinary study that analyzes texts between cultures by observing a literary framework based on space and time (Fariztina et al., 2025). Comparative literature studies can serve to analogize two literary works created from two different places. (Safitri, 2024). Comparisons in literature can be made to various elements contained in the work, such as themes, characters, plots, settings, conflicts, and other aspects that are part of a literary work.

Comparative literature studies not only pay attention to the similarities contained in works, but can also be used to see the differences that arise based on the background of creation, culture, and the context of each work. Comparing literary works is one of the methods used to appreciate literary works (Mahatan et al., 2023). Comparative literature studies actually do not have a specific theory in them, any theory can be used for literary comparison (Lahung et al., 2023). Thus, comparative literature can be used as a basis for examining two literary works that come from different cultural backgrounds by looking at certain elements contained in each work side by side.

### *Cultural Values*

Cultural values are a set of values, ideas, norms, and views that develop in the life of a society and serve as a guideline in determining attitudes and behaviors. Cultural values in the view of life are complex in terms of behavior that is very closely related to the self as a comprehensive way of life and that is owned and inherited from generation to generation (Masnunah et al., 2023). Cultural values are composed of arguments that develop in the minds of the majority of people related to what should be considered very valuable in the lives of Stalis et al., 2022). In literary works, cultural values can be reflected through the actions of the characters, the relationships between the characters, the habits, beliefs, and the way the characters face various problems in life. The existence of cultural values in a work can also show the background of people's lives that are the background for the birth of the story. Indonesia has many interesting legends scattered throughout the archipelago and these legends are a luxurious treasure in the development of literary and cultural works in Indonesia (Tondang et al., 2024). Therefore, the cultural value in the legend of Pulo Kemaro and Romeo and Juliet can be used to understand the social and cultural settings that affect the lives and actions of the characters, as well as being one of the aspects that can be considered in comparing the two works.

### *Moral Values*

Moral values are values that are related to good and bad human behavior and become a guideline in determining attitudes and actions in life. Morality itself has the meaning of normative and imperative discourse in a good and good order, which is the whole of our obligations (Arifin, 2019). In literary works, moral values can be reflected through behaviors, words, decisions, relationships between characters, and consequences that arise from the actions of characters in dealing with a problem. The delivery of morals through the routine of the characters is usually conveyed through

dialogues, body expressions, and the mindset of the characters contained in a story (Rosyanti, 2017). The morals that can be conveyed from the author through fictional works are very useful and beneficial for readers (Fajriati, 2017). Therefore, the moral values in the legends of Pulo Kemaro and Romeo and Juliet can be used to see the various attitudes and actions of the characters and the consequences they cause, thus helping to understand the moral messages contained in both works.

### *The Legend of Kemaro Island*

The legend of Pulo Kemaro is one of the folklore that developed in the city of Palembang, South Sumatra, and is related to the origins of Pulo Kemaro in the middle of the Musi River. In general, this story tells the relationship between the character Tan Bun Ann, a merchant of Chinese descent, and Siti Fatimah who is associated with the Malay community of Palembang (Choiriza et al., 2026). Tan Bun Ann as the main character is portrayed through the actions and decisions she takes when facing various situations in the story, especially when she receives an urn from her family which then causes misunderstandings. Tan Bun Ann's action towards the urns is an important part of the development of the conflict and leads the story to a tragic end. The name Kemaro Island itself was born from the word "Drought", because the island has never been submerged even when the water in the Musi River is rising or high tide (Budi, 2021). Thus, the legend of Pulo Kemaro is not only part of the cultural heritage of the people of Palembang, but also presents characters and a series of actions of characters that can be studied in understanding the development of events in the story.

### *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet is a romantic and tragic story between two young couples who are hindered by the family anger of both parties. This story ends tragically when these two couples commit suicide (Syofyan, 2022). This story begins with the disappointment experienced by Romeo, because Romeo's love for one of Capulet's nieces, named Rosaline, is unreciprocated. At the persuasion of Benvolio and Mercutio, he is finally willing to attend the Capulet family dance party in order to meet Rosaline. However, at the party, Romeo meets Juliet face-to-face for the first time, and falls in love at first sight (Amalia & Ramadhan, 2021). Romeo as the main character is described as a figure who has strong feelings of love and tends to act based on emotional impulses when facing various conflicts in his life. The decisions made by Romeo in dealing with love problems, disputes, and the circumstances he faces also affect the development of the plot until it results in a tragic ending. Therefore, Romeo's character can be understood through his actions, words, relationships with other characters, and the decisions he makes in dealing with conflicts, so that the character is relevant to be compared to the character of Tan Bun Ann in the legend of Pulo Kemaro.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with comparative literature studies. The qualitative method is a study process that produces data in a descriptive form that contains written or oral data from individuals or behaviors that can be observed (Setiyani et al., 2026:2). The descriptive approach is used to describe the moral values and cultural values contained in the Legend of Pulo Kemaro and Romeo and Juliet by

William Shakespeare, while comparative literary studies are used to compare the moral values and cultural values contained in the two works. The object of this research is the story of the Legend of Pulo Kemaro and the story of Romeo and Juliet. This research was carried out from early August to mid-September 2026 which included data source reading, data collection, data grouping, data analysis, and preparation of research results. Data collection was carried out by reading and recording techniques, namely reading the two works carefully and then recording words, sentences, dialogues, narratives, actions, and events that contain moral values and cultural values in accordance with the focus of the research. Furthermore, the data was analyzed using content analysis techniques by identifying data that contained moral values and cultural values, grouping data based on the type of values found, and then comparing the similarities and differences in moral values and cultural values contained in the two works. The results of the analysis were then described qualitatively according to the focus of the research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Results*

The results of data collection found from 100 Folklore of the Archipelago (Kristiani, 2023) and from the book Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare, 2025) are in the form of comparisons of elements in the story that contain similarities between the main characters, namely Tan Bun An and Romeo Montague, arranged in the following table.

**Table 1. Comparison of intrinsic and extrinsic elements**

| Comparative Elements | The Legend of Kemaro Island (Palembang) | Romeo and Juliet (West) |
|---|---|---|
| Story theme | True love, misunderstanding, and cultural acculturation. | Romantic love that is hindered by family enmity. |
| Causes of Tragedy | Prejudice & Impulsivity: Rushing to throw away treasures because of a misunderstanding of looking outside the jar. | Family Hostility & Communication Barriers: A secret message about a fake death fails to be delivered. |
| Main Characters | Siti Fatimah (local, loyal) & Tan Bun An (foreigner, impulsive). | Romeo Montague (melancholy) & Juliet Capulet (bold). |
| Final Resolution | Both characters died in the water (Musi River), triggering the emergence of a new natural/island phenomenon. | Both figures died in the grave, leading to peace between the two hostile families. |
| Physical Monuments | It is the origin of Kemaro Island, Hok Tjing Bio Temple, and Tomb side by side. | It became a symbol of world pop-culture (Juliet's Balcony in Verona, Italy). |

**Table 2. Comparison of the tragedy experienced by the two characters in the story**

| Number | Data Source | Text Data Excerpt / Narrative | Initial Analysis (Intertextual Interpretation) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Legenda Pulau Kemaro | "...Tan Bun An, who was possessed by anger, immediately threw the jars without examining the bottoms..." | Shows the male protagonist's impulsive, emotional, and reactive disposition to material problems. |
| 2. | Romeo and Juliet (Act V, Scene III) | "Here's to my love! [Drinks the poison] O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick. This with a kiss I die." | Shows Romeo's melancholic and reactive character. He immediately makes a fatal decision without logical verification. |

### *Discussion*

Based on the results that have been analyzed, there are several similarities and differences between the Legend of Pulo Kemaro and Romeo and Juliet. This can be seen from the theme, the cause of the tragedy, the main character, the completion of the story, and the physical relics related to the two stories. In terms of theme, the Legend of Pulo Kemaro describes the story of "true love, misunderstanding, and cultural acculturation", while Romeo and Juliet centers on the story of "Romantic love that is hindered by family enmity". Differences are also seen in the cause of the tragedy. In The Legend of Pulo Kemaro, the tragedy begins when Tan Bun Ann experiences a misunderstanding, namely by "rushing to throw away the treasure because of a misunderstanding of the outside of the jar". Meanwhile, in Romeo and Juliet, tragedy develops through “Family Hostility & Communication Barriers: A secret message about a fake death fails to be delivered”. In the character section, both stories present a couple who are at the center of the conflict, namely "Siti Fatimah (local, loyal) & Tan Bun An (foreign, impulsive)" in the Legend of Pulo Kemaro, and "Romeo Montague (melancholy) & Juliet Capulet (bold)" in Romeo and Juliet. The completion of the story also shows a difference, because the tragedy in the Legend of Pulo Kemaro, "both characters die in the water (Musi River), triggering the emergence of a new natural/island phenomenon", while in Romeo and Juliet, "both characters die in the grave, leading to the peace of the two hostile families". In addition, both stories have relics or places related to the story, namely "Kemaro Island, Hok Tjing Bio Temple, and Tomb side by side" in the story of Pulo Kemaro as well as "a symbol of world pop-culture (Juliet's Balcony in Verona, Italy)" related to the story of Romeo and Juliet.

Furthermore, the results that have been analyzed show the actions taken by Tan Bun Ann and Romeo in the part of the story that is an important point in the development of the tragedy. In the dialogue table above, namely “...Tan Bun An, who was possessed by anger, immediately threw the jars without examining the bottoms...” Tan Bun Ann is depicted immediately taking action by throwing the jars he brought after experiencing anger and not checking the bottom of the jar first. This action is part of a series of events that then leads to the development of tragedy in the Legend of Pulo Kemaro. Meanwhile, Romeo in Romeo and Juliet takes action by drinking poison after obtaining information about Juliet's death. In the dialogue table above, it is “Here's to my love! [Drinks the poison] O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick. This with a kiss I

die". The excerpts shown in the table show that Romeo made the decision to end his life after learning of Juliet's circumstances without knowing that the information about the death did not actually correspond to the actual circumstances. Thus, both data show the actions taken by the main characters when faced with a situation that was considered the end of their relationship. Although the two actions are different, Tan Bun Ann's and Romeo's actions are both an important part of the development of the conflict and bring the story to a tragic conclusion.

***Cultural Values That Are Embedded***

The cultural value in the Legend of Pulo Kemaro is seen through the meeting between the Palembang and Chinese cultural backgrounds represented through the relationship between Tan Bun Ann and Siti Fatimah. Tan Bun Ann is described as a character from China, while Siti Fatimah is a character from the Palembang environment. The meeting of the two characters shows the relationship between two different cultural backgrounds in a series of stories. This element is increasingly seen through the existence of Kemaro Island and Hok Tjing Bio which in the research findings are associated with the story of the two characters. Kemaro Island is an important part of the storyroom because it is related to the events experienced by Tan Bun Ann and Siti Fatimah, while Hok Tjing Bio shows the existence of Chinese cultural elements inherent in the region. Thus, the culture in the Legend of Pulo Kemaro is not only present through the identity of the characters, but also through the space and relics related to the development of the story. This shows that the legend of Pulo Kemaro represents the meeting of two cultural backgrounds in the life of the people in Palembang.

Meanwhile, the cultural value in Romeo and Juliet can be seen through the strong position of the family in the lives of the characters. The relationship between Romeo and Juliet is in the environment of two large families, namely Montague and Capulet, who have disputes. The existence of the family is a part that affects the relationship between the two main characters because the relationship between Romeo and Juliet does not only involve personal decisions, but also in the social environment of their respective families. This condition shows that the family has an important position in the social life of the characters and also determines the development of the relationship between the characters. In addition, the setting of Verona and the existence of Juliet's balcony related to the story show that there is a relationship between the work and the cultural space in which the story is known. When compared to the Legend of Pulo Kemaro, both works show that the relationship between the characters is influenced by the social and cultural environment in which they live. The difference lies in the form of representation, namely the Legend of Pulo Kemaro is more visible through the meeting of Palembang and Chinese backgrounds and the existence of spaces and relics related to the story, while Romeo and Juliet is more visible through the position of the family and the disputes between families that are part of the social life of the characters.

***Moral Values That Are Held***

Based on the findings in the Legend of Pulo Kemaro, moral value can be seen through Tan Bun Ann's actions when facing situations that cause anger and misunderstanding. Tan Bun Ann immediately throws the jars into the river without first examining the bottom of the jar. This action shows that emotional control and prudence

in dealing with a problem are important in life. Decisions made in anger and without considering the situation more deeply can have great consequences for themselves and others. In the context of the story, Tan Bun Ann's actions then develop into a series of tragic events that end with the death of himself and Siti Fatimah. Therefore, through the actions of the character, a moral picture can be found about the importance of controlling emotions, not being hasty in making decisions, and considering the consequences before taking an action.

Meanwhile, the moral value in Romeo and Juliet can be seen through Romeo's actions when he learns the news of Juliet's death. Romeo shows a very strong loyalty and attachment to Juliet by making the decision to drink poison after hearing the news. Romeo's actions show that the love relationship in the story is portrayed through loyalty and willingness to take great risks for the sake of his loved ones. However, this action also shows that decisions made based on information that are not yet known to be true can have fatal consequences. Romeo does not know that Juliet's death that was reported to him is not a real situation. Thus, the data shows the existence of moral values in the form of loyalty and sacrifice in relationships, as well as providing an idea of the importance of considering the circumstances and ensuring the truth of information before making a decision.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, the comparison of the Legend of Pulo Kemaro and Romeo and Juliet shows that both works present a love story that develops in a social and cultural environment that also influences the lives of the characters, but each work represents a different cultural background and pattern of social life. The Legend of Pulo Kemaro shows the meeting of Palembang and Chinese cultures through the relationship between Tan Bun Ann and Siti Fatimah and its relationship with Kemaro Island and Hok Tjing Bio, while Romeo and Juliet shows the strength of the family's position through the dispute between Montague and Capulet. From a moral point of view, both works show that the actions and decisions of the characters in dealing with conflicts have consequences for the development of the story. The findings show that the differences in cultural backgrounds do not eliminate the existence of humanitarian problems that can be found in both works, but affect the way these problems are represented through the characters, social relationships, conflicts, and story resolution. Substantively, this study shows that comparative literary studies can be used to understand literary works not only based on their similarities and differences, but also to see how a work represents human values and experiences through different cultural contexts. The implication of this research is that the reading of local literary works such as the Legend of Pulo Kemaro can be placed in a wider space of study through comparison with world literary works, so that the richness of local culture can be understood side by side with cultural representations in works from different environments.

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