

Triadic Interplay: A Model of Transforming Literature into Wayang Theatre

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Abstract

Dramatic literature (be it in the form of a poem, poetry, prose, verse, play, epic, or other narrative reservoir listed below under Literary References) typically creates the most extensive public awareness when it is transformed into multiple aesthetic expressions and performed into theatre. While putting a play on stage may be well known as *mise en scene*, this article introduces triadic creative interplay (*trisandi*) within form-plot-character, a model to transform literature into a wayang puppet show. Literature modifies the name of the puppetry according to the narrative source, for example: Wayang Ramayana, Wayang Parwa/Mahabharata, and even Wayang Greek Myth when the show recounts a story based on Greek mythology. If the literature is transformed into plot, it becomes the story, theme, drama, and social message of the wayang puppet show. Finally, when literature manifests into dramatic characters, the protagonist's and antagonist's actions are modified according to the dramatic motive of the piece. The *dalang* puppet master uses their creativity to conceptualise the chronological transformation of literature into wayang puppetry in three stages. (1) Before the show: creativity in plot guides the *dalang* to convert narrative literature into a play, select, create or originate a story. (2) During the presentation: the *dalang* transforms literature into word play / pun, narrative lines, sung and dialogues, social commentary and criticism. (3) After the show: literature guides the *dalang* to bridge the material realm into the spiritual realm, to transform spiritual norms into ritual mantra, to transform regular water into holy water, and so forth.

Keywords: Dramatic literature, Wayang puppet theatre, *Trisandi* triadic interplay, *Kawi Dalang* puppeteer's creativity

To create a wayang puppetry performance, a *dalang* puppet master employs literature to build creative interplay and response. In Indonesia, more particularly Bali, the traditional model used to transform literature into a wayang puppet show is known as *trisandi* (triadic interplay) made up of the triadic elements of form-plot-character. When literature transforms into wayang puppetry it modifies the name of the wayang, for example Wayang Ramayana, Wayang Parwa/Mahabharata, Wayang Cupak, Wayang Tantri, as so on. When literature transforms into plot, it becomes the narrative reservoir from which to build the theme, dramatic structure, setting, and social message of the puppetry. Finally, when literature transforms into character, it specifies the protagonist and antagonist actions according to its dramatic motive.

The theory of the puppeteer's creativity (Kawi Dalang) conceptualizes the transformation of literature into a wayang puppet show in three different phased stages: (1) Creativity in plot before the show requires *dalang* to convert the narrative format of the literature into dramatic dialogues, to select a story or to create or originate

story. (2) Creativity in presentation requires the *dalang* to transform literature into word play / pun, narrative lines, social commentary and criticism, using both sung and spoken lines. (3) For spiritual creativity after the show, the literature guides the *dalang* to create a bridge between the spiritual and material realms, to transform spiritual norms into numerous ritual mantra incantations, to transform regular water into holy water, and so on.

Historic Literary Recitation and Its Transformation into Theatre

The ritual reading of poetry in many ethnic cultures has been constituted as proto-theatrical practice (Foley, 1993: 119-120). Just as the oral narrative of *Dithyramb* in ancient Greek poetry to honor the God Dionysus was sung and danced into Tragedy in the fifth century BC (Brockett, 1991: 16), the selected segment of *kakawin* (old Javanese poems) in Bali was and is transformed into a wayang puppet show. Still widely practiced in numerous Balinese ritual celebrations, such ritual reading is known as *pasantian* or *santi* (peace). Regular literary slams commissioned by Bali provincial government are not meant to merely maintain literary heritage, they further serve as spiritual purification or enlightenment. This *pasantian* is held with ritual offerings and the burning of incense in such devout reverence that “*Sang Yogiswara sista; sang sujana sudha manahira wus maca sira*” [the poet/poetry’s devoutness is peace; the learner’s feelings are purified after reading it]. Through reciting a *kakawin* poem, the reader / reciter’s feelings are supposed to be purified and relieved, while the audience is enlightened.

Commissioned by the King Sri Maharaja Isana Dharmawangsa Teguh Ananta Wikrama Tunggaladewa of Medang kingdom, East Java, in the ninth century, the *kakawin* was the translation and transformation of the Indian Sanskrit epics into Old Javanese poems (Agastia, 1994; Zoetmulder, 1974: 3). Perhaps more complex than what Shakespeare did, the court poets composed the *kakawin* using an integrated method that fuses music, drama, and literary recital. This has become a challenge for our current puppetry students since the *kakawin* was composed rigorously with complex prosodic stipulations, which only few of us can commit to master.

To maintain and enhance the oldest extant literary studies, the provincial government continually holds a prestigious sacred chanting competition known as *Utsawa Dharma Gita*. This literary competition is really part of a Hindu religious tradition, rich in cultural and spiritual values, as a source of inspiration for the nation's character building. With lyrics originating from Vedas (religious texts originating from ancient India), this sacred chant creates a serene, prudent, and divine sense appropriate for accompanying religious ceremony. While we learnt sacred humanism from Erasmus and secular humanism from Machiavelli, from wayang we are already able to identify, formulate and activate wayang humanism, consisting of five integrating concepts about *satya* (the truth), *dharma* (the duty or obligation), *bhakti* (respect), and *ahimsa* (non-violence).

Historic literary transformation and activation into theatre to create further public awareness can be extended back to phallic song/rhyme enacted into comedy in the fourth century BC. Rhyme with dirty songs are often adapted and exploited by comic servants, buffoons, and folk characters in wayang, topeng masked theatre, and other performance genres. In contemporary Bali, literary slam (*lomba nyastra*) manifests in the form of a modern drama competition, continually presented as a segment of the annual Bali art festival.

Literature Modifies the Form of Wayang

Through such existing tradition, a selected episode of the kakawin *Ramayana* is commonly reconstructed and transformed into a *Wayang Ramayana* shadow puppet show. An equally popular and even more extensive poem is the *Kakawin Bharatayuddha* by Mpu Sedah and Mpu Panuluh, commenced by the brothers on Nov. 6, 1157 AD or 1079 Saka (*sanga-kuda-śuddha-candramā*) (Zoetmulder 1974) which is enacted into *Wayang Parwa*. A segment or canto (*parwa*) of the *Bharatayuddha* (the war of Bharata family in the *Mahabharata*) is always selected and transformed into *Wayang Parwa*, or in Java *Wayang Purwa*. This form is called *Wayang Parwa* instead of *Wayang Mahabharata* because only one *parwa* of the 18 *parwas* of the *Mahabharata* can be performed in one night. It is difficult to perform the whole lengthy *Bharatayuddha* or *Mahabharata* in one single traditional puppet show. Needing to recite the poem — whether it be *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Brata Yuddha*, *Sutasoma*, etc—and to translate it into vernacular language for numerous ritual celebrations, dozens of literary people are motivated to learn related theatrical skills and eventually are capable of being a *dalang* puppet master who can perform certain types of wayang puppet show.

Triadic Interplay (*Trisandi*): a Model of Transforming Literature into Wayang Theatre (Sedana, 2002: 33)



So too when selecting and transforming the local dramatic repertoire into a wayang puppet show. If the *dalang* puppeteer selects a story from the local poetry (*geguritan*) of *Cupak* the puppet show is called *Wayang Cupak*. If wayang narrative repertoire is based on the *calonarang* (a traditional story about a woman who was thought to be a witch), featuring mystical black magic or a tempest, the show is called *Wayang Calonarang*. If the theme is based on the genealogical *babad* (chronicle), in which history is mixed with mythology, the show is called *Wayang Babad*. When recounting an animal story from the *kidung* (canticle) of *Tantri* the show is called *Wayang Tantri*.

This model has been observable beyond Bali too, for example: having learnt Greek mythology through Western theatre history class at Brown University a *dalang* performed “Wayang Greek myth” (1992) recounting story based on Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*. A few years later, having read a segment of the tragic story from Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the *dalang* created a segment of “Wayang Pyramus and Thisbe” at Butler University, Indianapolis (2012). Next, having read Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and being expected to perform it in Balinese theatrical forms, the *dalang* composed a segment of “Wayang Bali Tempest” at the East 15th Acting School Essex University UK (2014). For a *dalang* practitioner it may take anywhere between 1 to 3 weeks to internalize a new story.

Thus, the second word that names the form or type of wayang is the modifier, derived from the name of its narrative source. In addition to its manifestation in the name, type, and form of wayang puppetry, literature further manifests in the theme, title, plot, narration, dialogue or dramatic lines from preparing the play

construction, and then during the performance, until finally the spiritual creativity after and beyond the wayang puppet show.

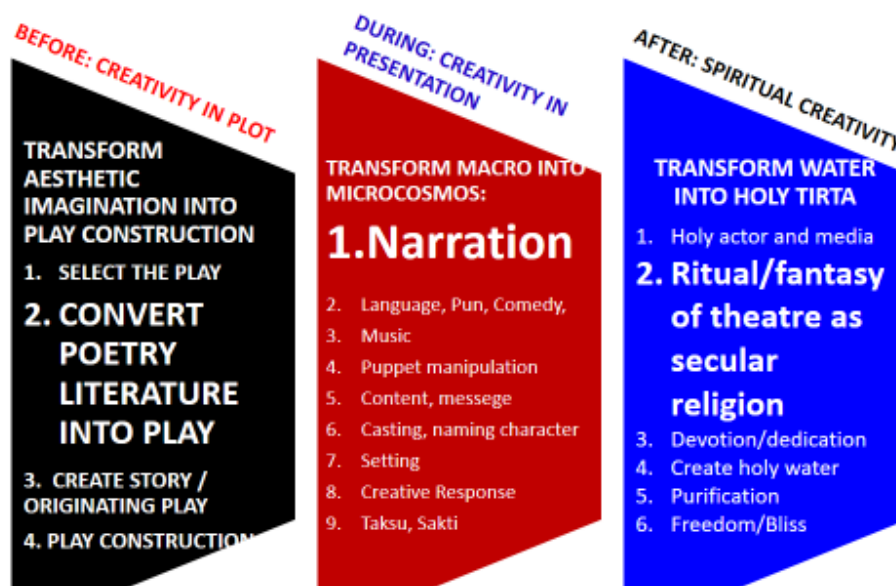
Literary Transformation before the Show: Creativity in Plot

Literary elements invariably manifest before, during, and after the wayang puppet performance. Before the show literature must first be selected based on the desired theme, plot, dramatic characters, setting, and expected message, and must be coherent with the function and meaning of its socio-cultural celebration. Alternatively, the *dalang* may modify or create a branch story, or may create an original play. In any case, the *dalang* will typically continue to convert the narrative format of the poem or poetry into a single performable play, which has conventional structural elements. The task now is to create a one-time play script, known as *sanggit / pakem jangkep*) as the blueprint for the show inline with the following seven steps of play construction:

1. Divide and decide *rwabinada* – the two opposing forces, protagonist versus antagonist characters, including a tritagonist character if required;
2. Reconstruct the play for the specific show according to the convention of the established puppetry form;
3. Apply the method of creative construction: locating, chopping, unifying, reversing with a flashback technique, or transposing;
4. Identify preferable plot elements, which include emotional arrangement (love, sadness, comic, tragic, misunderstanding), and present dramatic gaps with conflict of interests for increasing dramatic tensions, until concluding with a fighting scene;
5. Consult the primary dramatic literature and embellish it with non-dramatic literature;
6. Excerpt appropriate plot or passages from literature or wise words of famous scientists, Nobel prize winners, influential politicians;
7. Reflect the external context on contemporary relevance, trends, and tendencies around its socio-cultural milieu. (Sedana, 2015)

It may be an epic or a chronicle, it may be in a poetic or prose format now the literature has already been transformed into a holistic play (*pakem jangkep*) for one full wayang puppet show. Thus, the literary multiple transformations moving from the potential narrative reservoir, toward the active repertoire, and finally to a storytelling of progressive performance that creates public awareness.

**Transformative Elements of Poetry into Wayang: before, during and after the show
based on the creative theory, *Kawi Dalang* (the creativity of puppet master):**



Creativity in Presentation: The Transformation of Literature into Dramatic Stage Life

While theatre typically transforms social drama into aesthetic stage drama or vice versa, in wayang, the *dalang* through reciting mantra incantation with wayang Kayonan tree of life starts by transforming the macrocosmos into microcosmos. The newly created microcosmic world is conflated with the selected episode of the dramatic literature. This dramatic source is further proliferated into the following nine aesthetic elements during the presentation.

1. Narration may be done by both visualization and sung or spoken lines most likely quoted from the dramatic repertoire.
2. Dialogue between characters is largely converted from the narrative nature of the dramatic source, and is always embellished by comedic pun and amusing language (Zurbuchen, 1987); many of them are adapted from recent “phallic” songs. Some wise words may be quoted from non-dramatic literature like *Nitisastra*, *Sarasamuscaya*, *Bhagavadgitha*, *Slokantara*, or other holy scripture, especially to provide social commentary and subtle criticism.
3. The music and theatrical music accompanying certain scenes may be adapted from the lyrics of the poetry into a *rebong* love song and *genjek* drunken choir by the female *sinden* chorus, mixed vocal and instrumental music, in alternation with the *punakawan* buffoon interlude (Gold, 1998).

4. Wayang puppet manipulation and actions, along with its dancing shadows is often patterned in the tune of the rhythmic poetry or sung dramatic prose.
5. The content of the story is conflated with current social issues and rumors; any political, social, economic, and even human turbulence or natural disaster may be reflected into a unique social commentary, criticism, and entertainment to contribute a social solution or enlightenment.
6. Casting the wayang puppet and naming characters relevant to its dramatic reservoir or literature leads to the selection of puppet for appropriate dramatic character and further sub-division of its dramatic mode (*wanda*) to fit its role in the dynamic flow of plot structure.
7. The setting adopted and activated from the dramatic repertoire is more virtual than actual. The virtual setting may be enriched by importing additional anecdotes beyond the current basic stream of the plot. For example, when Hanoman rescues Anggada and the monkey warrior bashed by the giant Kumbakarna, the punakawan buffoon compares and relates it to the way lord Vishnu's Avatar as a huge pig Waraha million years ago during the age of Satya yuga rescued this planet when it was slammed down by the demon Hiranyaksa.
8. Creative response to any circumstances may need the least reference to the literary source among the creativity in plot. However, reading extensive social media as a part of virtual literature can significantly help the *dalang* to provide an effective creative response. Thus, none of the creativity in presentation can ignore the literary source, although the intensity varies widely.
9. Taksu is the ultimate aesthetic achievement, spiritual power, or divine vibration a *dalang* puppet master can expect through vigorous and rigorous endeavor. In addition to complying with holy scripture, one of the late gurus of topeng and wayang once said: "Keep on practicing and studying until you tired, you shall get your taksu by then"

Spiritual Creativity After/Beyond Wayang Show: Transforming Water into Holy Tirta

In addition to being on UNESCO's masterpiece list of the intangible and tangible heritage of humanity since November 7th 2003, wayang is indeed the oldest extant theatrical form that needs holy actors (Jro Mangku or Ki Mangku Dalang) and media to perform it into its full degree and capacity governed by the holy scripture of *Dharma Pewayangan* (DP) or wisdom of puppetry. There is a social recognition, artistic achievement, traditional lore or justification, and literary criteria a *dalang* has to accomplish until s/he possess artistic and spiritual credibility to create tirta holy water for personal and ritual purification, even in village purifications in Java.

Spiritual norm and ritual form formulated in holy scripture and the *dalang*'s fantasy serve as media to treat wayang theatre as secular religion. It is certainly by understanding the divine philosophy (*Tatwa*), the spiritual norm (*Tantra*) and religious experiences written into several holy scriptures like DP, *Siwa Gama* (Shivaism), *Nitisastra* (literary guidance), *Slokantara* (middle poem), *Purana Bali* (Bali ancient history), *Widhi Tatwa* (theology), and dozens of kakawin poems (see Hooykaas, 1993; Zoetmulder 1994). Many similar materials also imported from Java such as *Pustaka Raja Purwa* (ancient king library), *Sastramiruda* (puppetry guidance and history), *Bima Nawaruci* (Bima's enlightenment), and *Tangtu Panggelaran* (Java mythology). As a theological belief system tantra is further implemented into ritual form (*Yantra*), performing it with appropriate gestures (*Mudra*), and reciting it into holy incantation (*Mantra*).

Although: (1) the wayang creative concepts & technology seems to share the same theoretical understanding of electrons as expounded in physical science and chemistry; (2) the mandala of wayang shares the same configuration with the orbit of the electron, and perfectly manifests into the Kayonan dance/choreography; (3) symbolizing five universal elements the Kayonan puppet is first taken and tapped on the pure head of *dalang* while reciting mantra that transforms macrocosmos into microsomos, by recalling multicolor Gods / electrons and uniting them into Kayonan; (4) the trinity of Sanghyang Gurureka-Aji Saraswati-Kawiswara in the center of the mandala is quite the same as the role of neutron-nucleus-proton in the center of electron's orbit; and (5) although the multicolor Gods along with their varying spectrum energy (*bayu* or *urip*) and cosmic radiation is very similar to the multicolor moving electron, yet most of these things are uniquely Baliese that might be largely debatable to others as ethnology in Bali is more prevalence than pure science in its multiple aesthetic cultural expressions. Consequently, it is indeed equally debatable as to why Balinese dedicated puja offering to pacify the "renegade" lower spirits and responded bomb with ritual purification instead of revenge to the treasonous terrorists with triple power of retaliation.

In the ritual context the *dalang* holy actor must dedicate his service to divine devotion through a wide range of religious activities. Spiritually, the *dalang* employs his body as a mystical symbol to expound metaphysics or the cosmos; he is the bridge between people in the mundane world and the Gods in the spiritual realm; he recites mantra incantations from this temporal space to attract the Gods' grace and blessing in the eternal life. Ultimately, he transforms regular water in this world into tirta holy water from the divine realm for the beneficiary client in this civilized community. The supreme objective is formulated in this mantra "*sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta*" [may all creatures are happy].

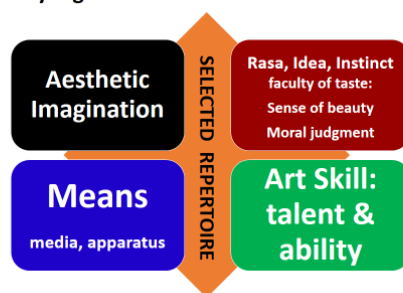
As a result, the values of *welas asih* (compassion), *satyam* (the truth), *siwan* (purity), and *sundaram* (beauty) are combined to purify people in the *ruwatan* ceremony. Getting rid of impurity, and being able to control

sadripu (the six internal enemies) and *sapta timira* (the seven deadly sins), constitutes enough for people to enjoy freedom, including from the threat of malevolent demonic forces, and starts to attract benevolent spirits toward increasing success, happiness or bliss.

Narrative Repertoire as the Wayang Creative Sources

Let us flash back to the wayang creative source, whether initially motivated by imagination or media or idea or artistic skill, talent or ability, once the narrative repertoire is selected the rest of wayang artistic creativities develop accordingly. From the central back drop the repertoire's interrelated concepts may be visualized as this:

Wayang Creative Sources Before the Show



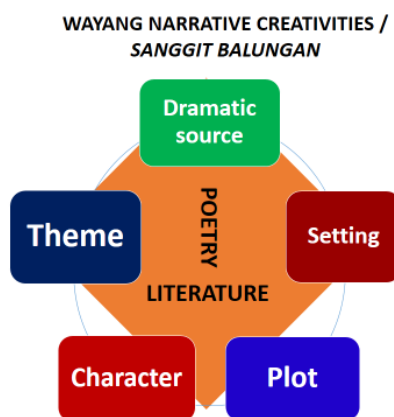
1. Featured on the top left: the natural aesthetic imagination has successfully led into the creation of many artistic masterpieces including wayang puppet theatre. This aesthetic imagination is accessible from the supreme God's creation, since only nature has the absolute beauty, from which the artist will make a partial duplicate or imitation, repetition, and emulation as personal artistic expressions. In doing so the current students in tertiary art institution are directed to do research like the olden day artists' approaches: Contemplation, *semedi*, or spiritual experiences through *samara puja* (to worship the God of love); *angdon lango* or *angregep lango* (prompting and expecting ultimate aesthetic blessing).
2. Presented on the top right: idea, *rasa*, intuition, faculty of taste: moral judgment and sense of beauty, which enables the said artist to transform the natural aesthetic imagination into human art works. Varying traits and qualities of *rasa* intuition may manifest into multi-aesthetic expressions, be it realistic or highly abstract or stylized, romanticism or naturalism or surrealism. However, in wayang it is traditionally dominated by symbolism as opposed to contemporary modernism.
3. Featured on the bottom left: Means - apparatus, methods, and processes needed to materialize the art product, which enables the creation of various branches of fine arts and performance/theatre, including multimedia arts.

- Presented on the bottom right: Rigorous artistic skill and specific dexterity or ability obtained through vigorous and endless practice. Part of those skills might have been mastered and the rest must be rehearsed accordingly.

These four aesthetic variables are cohesively integrated and affected by the narrative repertoire.

Transformation of Literature into Wayang Dramatic Elements

Literature in Bali invariably instigates direct connection to wayang, in which it is transformed into five dramaturgical deliberations; the titles are selected and listed below under Literary References. The simplest dramatic manifestation as a synopsis or an outline skeleton drama is called as *sanggit / pakem balungan*. Further elaborated and developed dramatic structure is called *pakem gancaran*, which should finally be completed and used as a complete play script known as *pakem jangkep*. The five correlative dramatic elements of wayang theatre may be visualized as this.



Described one after another in counter clockwise direction, these five dramatic elements include: dramatic source, theme, character, plot and setting. These may be further elaborated one after another as follows:

- Dramatic source, whether it be derived from epics, poetry, prose, and related mythology, tends to be creative interplay with the local environment and culture or tradition as well;
- Theme, along with its socio-cultural meaning and message, which may provide moral directions, social commentary or criticism for the art consumers to achieve a different awareness or even enlightenment;
- Character, along with its distinctive motive serving as the driving force. The content of the selected poetry manifests throughout the story and motive of every character. Therefore, the poetry provides a cue to identify the affiliation of each character: who are the protagonist, antagonist or tetragonist characters.

4. Plot, the dramatic streams and structure, at least the synopsis with its dramatic trajectory. After being restructured from the full narrative reservoir into a segmented wayang puppet play, the selected poetry further elaborates the plot into greater detail, from meeting scene exposition, to *angkat-angkatan* rising action, complications through a *rebong* love scene and/or *tangis* sad scene, until it reaches a fighting climax, accompanied by falling action, resolution, and finally conclusion.
5. Setting, both actual and virtual, which may manifest through visual images or spoken narrations. However, the poetry tends to emphasize the virtual dramatic setting rather than the actual setting of the show.

Conclusion

The transformation of literature as the content into the wayang puppet show as the form is governed by the traditional triadic model of form-plot-character. Affected by the patron or audience's expectation, the performance context, personal talent, ability and preference of the *dalang* puppeteer, this model allows a creative interplay among the three adjustable variables of form, plot, and character.

Creative interplay in plot starts before the show; creative interplay in presentation takes place during the show. Finally, creative interplay after the show features a range of spiritual creativity. Transporting this mortal community from the mundane world to the Gods and Goddesses in the spiritual realm, the *dalang* puppeteer upgrades their role and social responsibility into that of a holy artist to transform regular water from the kitchen into *tirta* holy water from the divine realm for the beneficiary in his/her home. In doing a show, the *dalang* has to delve into ritual and fantasy to make his artistry like a secular religion and as a means to reach the highest principles.

In this highest capacity the *dalang* accumulates *urip/bayu* energy of varying spectrum from his own macro and microcosmic radiation, by employing *agni* (the fire, from his lantern lamp and incense) to connect the object and subject; employing *gangga* (the water, in the silver beaker/ bowl/ pitcher) to create the desired object (*tirta* holy water); and finally they employ *maruta* (the wind, from his deep mantra, music and exaggerated voice) to convert ability into action. Wind in the sky serves as horizon to inspire infinite art and culture. *Agni* fire in the city is the embodiment of human refinement or cultural life. *Gangga* water stands for the flow of history and traditions of the region. Before it is implemented the holy scripture *Dhama Pewayangan* (puppetry wisdom) describes *dalang* as this:

Be informed that *dalang* in the body is pure and incorporeal.

Dalang is the interior of the heart, the artery. He looks beautifully multicolored.
His voice is able to say all that can be said. The lesson of true nature is his name;
His incorporeal action manifests in Three Strides (Wisnu) (Hooykaas, 1973: 18)

This is translated from:

[*Kawruhakena kang dalang ri sarira ning suksma.*
Kang dalang ri pantaraning papusuh, gegadingnya. Rupanian endah.
Swarania sakawuwus-wuwus. Sang Tutur Jati ngarania suksma;
Tri Wikrama tingkahnia suksma] (Hooykaas, 1973: 18).

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