

# *Petruk-gareng in three musketeers, A strategy to gain popularity*

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**Abstract.** The development of *wayang* comics in Indonesia had given birth to a new genre: “Petruk-Gareng” comics. In this new genre, parody style is considerably used, which led Petruk-Gareng to other directions. The characters known as *punakawan* from *wayang* stories are Semar, Gareng, Petruk and Bagong. In these comics these characters can enter different background stories. Using qualitative approach, the Petruk-Gareng comics are found to have used parody. It was started with the story of *Tiga Serangkai* (1963) and *20 Tahun Kemudian*, which were written and drawn by Indri Sudono. In this *Tiga Serangkai*, the parody approach was used for the first time. In popular culture, parody and genre are the tools used to attract readers and to accommodate the taste of the readers. Whether it is regarded as genre or subgenre of *wayang* comics, Petruk-Gareng was obviously a new way that allowed the interaction with other type of popular culture.

**Keywords:** Petruk-Gareng; Parody; Popular Culture

## 1 Introduction

Marcel Bonneff (1989) confirmed that *wayang* comic is a genre of Indonesian comic. This special comic genre was born as the original product of the Indonesian people taken from the *wayang* stories. Wayang comics were envisioned to be a good competitor of the imported comics and to minimize their assumed negative influences coming from the western comics. Such situation took place in the 1960s when translated comics were the dominant comics in the market. At that time it was urgent to find local comics that represent Indonesian culture. They needed a real and fast solution that must come from the local comics. In this situation wayang comics became the great solution. Wayang comics at that time appeared to have met all the requirements that were needed to be the competitor of the imported, translated comics. After the wayang comics entered the market, then this genre gave birth to Petruk-Gareng comics. From then on this interesting series had grown and gain its popularity among the Indonesian comic-readers. *Wayang* Comics as one of the genres in Indonesian comics had actually given birth to the comics with the character known as *punakawans*. Wayang comics, as confirmed by Marcel Bonneff (1989) [1], had always provide significant place for the four characters: Semar, Petruk, Gareng and Bagong. Although these *punakawans* consisted of four characters, in Petruk-Gareng comics only two of them: Petruk and Gareng who were used to develop stories. Through these two characters quite numerous comics had been created and it is just normal if the Petruk-Gareng comics had shaped a new genre (subgenre) in Indonesian comics.

### 1.1 *Wayang* and Punakawan

In Bonneff[2], it is clearly stated that wayang comics have always given an important place to clowns or jesters (*punakawan*). The physical appearance of Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong makes them clown characters. It seems that the physical appearance of the clowns has led them into this type of humour.

### 1.2 Genre, Parody, Hybridity and Popular Culture

Concerning the analysis of Petruk-Gareng comics, we find ourselves facing the concept of genre, parody, hybridity and popular culture in this particular kind of comic. The concept of genre apparently has never been totally fixed or it is just impossible to make it a fixed definition. Regarding genre theory, Hawkes (2003) [3] argues that a world without genre theory is impossible and inconsistent with human experience. We can distinguish between comedy and tragedy, although the two terms cannot be said to be as precise and exclusive as one might hope. In line with what Todorov said, Hawkes said that without such a theory, we would remain prisoners of prejudices passed down from century to century. It seems that the issue of genre cannot be considered something that is fixed; genre is always a dynamic process. The continuing shifting of genre boundaries, according to Todorov (in Hawkes, 2003), makes the definition of genre irreparable; what can be done is to carry out a continuous back and forth process between description at the level of fact and at the level of theoretical abstraction. This idea seems to be able to accommodate the discussion of the wayang comic genre, the Petruk-Gareng subgenre. The Petruk-Gareng comic departs from a wayang story; they are members of the clown group, which represents ordinary people.

Also reflecting on genre, Claudio Guillen (1971:109) [4] suggested, a genre is an invitation to form. The concept of genre works both ways: forward and backward at the same time. Backward, to the literary works that already existed whereas forward, to the direction of the apprentice, the future writer, the informed critic. A genre is a descriptive statement, but, rather often, a declaration of faith as well". Todorov, Guillen and Hawkes share the same thought on the definition of genre that the definition of genre cannot be established because they always go forward or backward. According to Todorov, the definition of genre is irreparable and what we can do is to keep going with back and forth process between the fact level and the level of theoretical abstraction. We can conclude that Todorov, Hawkes and Guillen are quite clear about the definition of genre and they share the same thought about it.

From this discussion, we can conclude that the convention of literary genre has never completely been met (hundred per cent fulfilled); there is always looseness; there is some particular freedom. As already mentioned above, Todorov (in Hawkes, 1977) [5] had stated that every work of masterpiece per definition creates its own literary genre. Todorov precisely said this, "tout grand livre établit l'existence de deux genres, la réalité de deux normes: celle du genre qu'il transgresse, qui dominait la littérature précédente; et celle du genre qu'il crée" (every great book establishes the existence of two genres, the reality of two norms: that of the genre it transgresses, which dominated previous literature; and that of the kind he creates).

In terms of the genre theory, wayang comics are regarded as a genre and Petruk-Gareng seems to fit as subgenre. However, in its development Petruk-Gareng comics that initially were part of the wayang comics seem to take a new direction and these comics walk its own path. Petruk-Gareng comics – if we may also consider it – to certain extent – as the subgenre of the wayang comics – have developed a number of strategies in order to sustain its existence since it has real readers; it has potential market. As wayang comics, the Petruk-Gareng comics take its stories from the wayang stories. However, this comic also uses a number of sources as its inspiration. It can draw stories from a totally different culture such as the classic works of the world writers.

Petruk-Gareng comics can be analysed as well using the concept of parody. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Guillen (1971) stated that genre is an invitation to form. Parody is basically a process of imitating other works (not limited to literature but all kinds of art) by commenting it and usually by making fun of it. For that reason, Guillen's suggestion is acceptable because in parody the artist (can be writer, musician, painter) does invite or include other works in the 'new' works.

Talking about hybridity, the Petruk-Gareng comic series noticeably also show this kind of approach. Art practitioners substantially integrate different genres in their work but it doesn't necessarily create a new criteria for a new art. Hybridity blurs the boundaries and this has encouraged artists – including comic artists – to share ideas that end up in cross-discipline in art and inter-media collaborations.

In terms of popular culture, this kind of comic has gone through several processes that are borrowed from other culture. Petruk-Gareng comics have been shaped under the influence of foreign stories. Petruk-Gareng comics had drawn stories from other foreign works and this strategy is part of the popular culture discussion.

## **2 Methods**

This qualitative method research works on the data available from the collected data in a previous research on comics. Thanks to the research titled "The Mapping of Genre and Subgenre 'Petruk-Gareng' Comics from 1955 to 2000", this particular research enjoys as many as 720 samples of Petruk-Gareng comics available to be analysed and discussed.

## **3 Result and Discussion**

It turns out that Indri Sudono was one of the most productive Indonesian comic artists. This Semarang born comic artist had integrated the *punakawan* characters – Semar, Gareng, Petruk, Bagong – in a variety of other popular genres. Among hundreds of comics being studied, the Petruk-Gareng works of Indri Sudono stood out (Gunawan et al, 2023) [6]. Indri Sudono was one of the productive Indonesian comic artists, who create a plethora of works of comics. This comic artist was born in Semarang, Central Java, in 1926 and passed away on 19 June 1979. Indri Sudono was the frontrunner in the making of the genre of comics like "Petruk-Gareng" that was published in a number of series titled "Dagelan" (Humour/Comedy). Other than that, the artist had integrated the *punakawan* characters – Semar, Gareng, Petruk, Bagong – in a variety of other popular genre.

The comic *Tiga Serangkai* is a parody of the French novel titled *Trois Mousquetaires* written by Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870). *Tiga Serangkai* was published in this period (1963), which was then continued by Indri Sudono with the title *20 Years Later* (*20 Tahun Kemudian*) (1965). The story is a parody style, or one that uses a story that was already very popular (prerequisite for parody style), not just "The Three Musketeers". Indri also made several adaptation titles, namely: "Owl Head" which was loosely adapted from the Belgian comic by Willy Vandersteen and the story "1001 Nights" entitled "Devil's Princess". All the comic stories use the Petruk-Gareng characters. Indri also adapted the very popular play "Petruk Becomes King" that was taken from the world of wayang tradition, which he named *Prabu Petruk, Djika Petruk Menjadi Ratu* (*Prabu Petruk, When Petruk Became King*). In this comic, Indri reinterprets the mythology about the origins of the *Punakawan* (Semar, Gareng, Petruk and Gareng).

The *Dagelan* series (Humour/Comedy Series) continued to be published by Loka Tjipta in Semarang. In the 1970s to 1980s Indri Sudono created the comic Petruk-Gareng for Tirtara

publisher, Semarang. These "Dagelan" (Humour/Comedy) style comics use the backdrop of people's daily lives with Punakawan characters and sometimes also include the children of the Punakawans. The story is in the form of short fragments. One fragment consists of four picture panels that evoke humour by depicting silliness or slapstick scenes of the Punakawan characters.

### 3.1 Parody Comics of The Three Musketeer

The Tiga Serangkai comics are the first parody comics of Indri Sudono who did the adaptation from a French novel written by Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870). The novel titled *Trois Mousquetaires* (The Three Musketeers, 1844) was adapted into Indonesian comics that were published in 1963. Three Musketeers was quite popular in Indonesia and through novel and feature film. Since 1903 to 1963 there have been 13 films adapted from the Three Musketeers novel. Those films might have somewhat inspired Indri Sudono. One of the films happened to use comedy approach, which is starred by comedian, Don Ameche and Ritz Brothers (1939). In 1954, the comedian group named The Three Stooges starred the parody film of *Musty Musketeers*, which was based on Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*. Later on, in 1964, Gold Key published a parody on *The Three Musketeers* in the *Three Stooges* comic series #19.



Figure 1. Five series of *Tiga Serangkai* and 20<sup>th</sup> *Kemudian*



Figure2. Film poster of a short parody starred by the comedian the Three Stooges in 1954 and 1964. The Three Stooges #19 published by Gold Key use parody approach as well taken from the Three Musketeers.

(Source of the Musty Musketeers poster <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047254/>, Gold key Comic #19 <https://www.ebay.com/itm/332646396781>)

### 3.2 Marrying Local and Global Elements

Tiga Serangkai shows us two important aspects that play an important role in maintaining the continuity of these clown figures, namely the historical aspect of tradition and the global aspect. We know that the journey of the clownish characters in the narrative world of the Archipelago (Indonesia) has been very long, especially when we draw a timeline starting from the Kediri Kingdom in 1100s, the beginning of the appearance of the punakawan in Gatotkacasraya manuscript written by Empu Panuluh. In 1955, the punakawan began to enter popular media, becoming characters in wayang genre comics, then getting their own comic series "Petruk-Gareng" which term has now become a kind of genre that is unique to the Indonesian comic universe. Numerous artists have followed this "genre", and from a search, which is certainly not complete; it was found that more than 700 comic titles were in the Petruk-Gareng "genre" from 1955 to 2000. Thus, the clowns in this comic are a continuation of the wayang tradition that has already existed and it remains in people's memory. Narratives about wayang and clowns utilize "new" media (at that time) to maintain the existence of the special clowns in the minds of the public.

### 3.3 Parody, A Narrative Approach

The title "Tiga Serangkai" use narrative approach, a kind of parody that was initiated by Indri Sudono, and later followed by other comic artists. This parody is one of the approaches in popular culture media. It makes use of other products that are already popular to be "loaded" with characters that at that time had become Indri Sudono's trademark (despite the fact that in terms of copyright it cannot be automatically claimed as Indri Sudono's rights). The story of Three Musketeers was chosen to create a parody considering that this particular story has become a collective memory of the Indonesian people and they got it through the novel and/or film. Using this strategy, it is easier to reach wider community and to be accepted in their memory.

The local and global elements are intertwined using parody storytelling techniques. The figures of Petruk and his brothers are woven and inserted into the structure of a story based on a novel that is already popular worldwide. In this reinterpretation using a parody approach, intertextuality can be found at play. The term 'intertextuality' refers to the reference of a literary, media, or social text to another literary, media, or social text. According to Alfaro (1996), this term was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to indicate the dialogic characteristics of language, and has been used in various academic disciplines to define the way meaning is constructed through and across other texts. [7] By emphasizing intertextuality over fidelity,

the best work in this field situates adaptation within a set of long-standing industry practices that produce and recycle narratives in the form of remakes, sequels, dashes, novelizations, videogames, DVD extras, and franchise "work builds" as well as straightforward "films in books".

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#### 4 Conclusion

The characteristics of the Tiga Serangkai comics came with promises of interesting (visual) narratives. Without even reading the contents of the comic, by just looking at the title and scene drawn on the cover, what the readers captured was the promise about their own cultural identity represented by the figure of the Punakawan. This was about a promise on the readers' participation in the big current of world trends (Three Musketeers). Apart from that, the name "Indri Sudono" itself was already a promise on quality that we often get from slapstick series that were published before Tiga Serangkai.

The use of a parody approach had provided the connection between "Petruk-Gareng" and "Three Musketeers" possible; two totally different cultural backgrounds were able to meet in one comic. The tradition of parody is basically to create a sensation by providing new humour to works that are already established or previously popular. The sensation that arises from the interweaving of elements from different texts becomes the potential to expand the extent of the reader's potential. In terms of art creation, such approach offers effective strategy where texts from previous cultural phenomena are used to create new art works, which in turn will have their own different cultural value.

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