



***Sanggit Lakon Carangan:*
Semiotic Analysis of Bagong Figures in the Ki Seno Nugroho Puppet Show**

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Abstract

Wayang kulit rose and became the prima donna through the play of the character Bagong by Ki Seno Nugroho on social media. This article aims to analyze the role and meaning of Bagong in the play of *wayang kulit* by Ki Seno Nugroho through a semiotic approach. Ki Seno Nugroho can bring the character of Bagong to life, not only playing a comedic role but also voicing social criticism and the values of people's wisdom. Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method examines data through signs and meanings formed in dialogues, gestures, expressions, and scenes involving Bagong. This method comprises denotation (literal sense) and connotation (cultural and ideological meaning). The semiotic approach was chosen because of its relevance in unraveling the layers of meaning of an artistic text to reveal more profound cultural and ideological implications. The data source was taken from the video documentation of Ki Seno Nugroho's performance on the *Dalang Seno YouTube* channel, which featured the plays *Bagong Ratu* and *Semar Mbangun Kayangan*. The results of the analysis show that (1) Bagong plays a role as a representation of the ordinary people, (2) Bagong serves as a medium of symbolic resistance to social inequality, and (3) Bagong serves as a communicative and entertaining conveyor of local wisdom. This study confirms the position of Punakawan as an essential narrative device in the play of Javanese puppetry.

Keywords: wayang kulit; Ki Seno Nugroho; Bagong; Punakawan; semiotics

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INTRODUCTION

Wayang kulit is a fair heritage of Javanese culture. *Wayang kulit*, as a Javanese cultural

heritage, has experienced a long journey as a performance medium and a vehicle for social

communication (Firdaus, 2023). In its development, *wayang kulit* is not only a sacred spectacle in traditional and religious ceremonies but also a reflective medium that reflects the socio-political dynamics of society (Anang et al., 2018). *Wayang kulit*, as an entertaining performance, has a very complex narrative and symbolic structure. Narrative elements in puppet performances, such as characters, storylines, dialogues, and visual symbolism, contain deep meanings to be interpreted into various contexts (Sazan, 2024). Beyond entertainment, puppet art is also a cultural text containing various communication strategies and ideologies. It contains philosophical and ethical values and reflects the life of the Javanese people from generation to generation (Ngatmin et al., 2025). This richness of meaning makes *wayang kulit* a relevant medium for understanding social and cultural dynamics.

Wayang kulit, as a traditional Javanese performing art, has a complex narrative structure and symbolic meaning. *Wayang kulit* is entertaining and a reflection of the rich culture and philosophy of Javanese society that has been passed down from generation to generation (Lely & Muhammad, 2024). Every play, every character, and every detail of movement and dialogue in the puppet show contains a deep layer of meaning, making it a rich "cultural text" of messages (Yasa, 2022). Each puppeteer has their peculiarities in conveying the message. It is recorded that there are several styles of puppet performances, such as Surakarta *gagrak*, Yogyakarta *gagrak*, Banyumasan *gagrak*, Kedu

gagrak, and Javanese coastal *gagrak* (Putro, 2013). The existence of these stalls indicates each region's characteristics and wisdom values (Kamsidjo & Sungging, 2020). Therefore, *sanggit lakon carangan* is a step used to convey a message and a vehicle for developing the puppeteer's self-identity.

Each song has its peculiarities. For example, in the narrative structure of *wayang kulit*, the presence of the character Punakawan is one of the elements that is not present in the Indian version of the Mahabharata–Ramayana story (Putri & Mamlahatun, 2023). Punakawan—especially Bagong—is a typical Javanese element that contains many layers of meaning. In the Banyumasan saga, the character of Bagong is referred to as Bawor (Tanudjaja, 2022). Punakawan functions as a comedy character who melts the atmosphere and as a voice of social criticism, and conveys the values of people's wisdom (Irma, 2017). This dual role makes Punakawan, especially Bagong specifically, interesting to study further in the context of contemporary puppet performances.

Punakawan occupies a sanggit room that is always in demand by the audience. Punakawan is a distinctive element in the puppet tradition that is only found in Javanese puppetry (Yulius, 2019). They consist of Semar, Garèng, Petruk, and Bagong and usually appear in interlude scenes called *limbukan* or *goro-goro*. The character of Bagong, as the youngest son of Semar, often appears in a humorous, outspoken, and often sarcastic style of the main characters, intelligently but unpretentiously (Arif, 2017).

Punakawan was specifically present in the *goro-goro* round (Ayu et al., 2023). However, not every puppeteer presents punakawan only in the *goro-goro* round but in other rounds to liven up the performance. This is one of the *sanggit* used by several puppeteers, including Ki Seno Nugroho, who specifically makes the character of Bagong the center of each of his performances (Hadiprayitno, 2021). Ki Seno Nugroho, a contemporary puppeteer widely known through digital media, presents the character of Bagong not only as a comedian but also as a presenter of social and moral criticism. Ki Seno Nugroho's approach is important because it can adapt *wayang kulit* to the contemporary context without losing the essence of tradition. Ki Seno Nugroho's presence on digital platforms such as YouTube has broadened the reach of *wayang kulit* to a broader audience.

Ki Seno Nugroho can present a creative play. *Carangan* plays—which are plays that are not directly sourced from the Mahabharata or Ramayana epics—become a creative space for Ki Seno to ground actual messages through folk figures such as Bagong (Purwandana, 2024). The flexibility of the play enables the puppeteer to incorporate contemporary and social criticism issues relevant to the current state of society, making the performance more lively and interactive (Angga et al., 2025). The creativity of this play shows how *wayang kulit* can continue to innovate and remain relevant as a medium of cultural communication (Alfiyah, 2024). This is shown by the relatively high number of subscribers and viewers for the traditional art

YouTube channel. The high public interest in watching puppet performances through Dalang Seno's YouTube channel indicates Ki Seno Nugroho's success in developing puppet performances (Rochana, 2020).

Research on *wayang kulit*, Punakawan, and the phenomenon of puppeteer Ki Seno Nugroho has been carried out a lot. From 2018 to 2025, several relevant studies have emerged from scientific journals. Pramudiyanto, Supana, and Rohmadi (2018), in an article entitled "Characteristic of Wong Cilik on *Wayang Kulit* Wanda of Panakawan Figures," have examined the semiotic meaning of Punakawan characters, including Bagong, as a reflection of the ordinary people or "small people". In addition, there is also a study by Kamsidjo and Sungging Widagdo (2020) on "Joglosemar *Wayang Kulit*: A Study on the Symbols and Meaning of *Wayang Kulit* in Jogja, Solo, and Semarang," which highlights the development of *wayang kulit*, including the *sangit* of the puppeteers. There is also a study by Arif (2017) on "Visual Communication Design for the Introduction of Punakawan Yogyakarta Puppet Characters through Their Physical Characteristics." This is proof that research on puppets, Punakawan, and puppeteers has been done a lot.

Despite this, research gaps are still being found. There have not been many studies that comprehensively and specifically use Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to unravel the layers of denotative and connotative meanings of the Bagong figure in depth. Analysis of Ki Seno Nugroho's play, which features Bagong as a sign in a digital

platform, is still limited. Observations of Ki Seno Nugroho's popularity and influence on platforms such as YouTube underscore the need for a more in-depth study of how this new medium influenced the formation of new styles, the spread, and the meaning of *wayang kulit* art.

This research offers significant novelty. The novelty of this research lies in Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of the character of Bagong in the play by Ki Seno Nugroho, which is presented through digital media (YouTube). The Bagong figure is suspected to represent the ordinary people and a medium of social criticism and local wisdom. This study will unpack how Bagong forms meaningful signs through dialogue, gestures, and scenes. Thus, this research is expected to provide an understanding of the role and adaptation of *wayang kulit* as a medium of cultural communication in the digital era through Roland Barthes' semiotics.

Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics fundamentally focuses on signs and the process of meaning-formation in various cultural and social phenomena (Maulida & Amy, 2024). Roland Barthes developed a semiotic framework rooted in the Saussurean concept of signifiers and signifieds (Putri et al., 2018). This development is carried out by adding more complex dimensions of meaning, denotation, connotation, and mythical concepts as ideological manifestations (Aziz, 2020). First, denotation refers to the first-level signification system. The signs in this case have a straightforward, explicit meaning and can be found literally in a dictionary or

conventionally agreed upon in a language community (Vebiola et al., 2025). In this state, the relationship between the marker (the physical form of a sign, such as a word, picture, or gesture) and the sign (the concept or object it represents) produces an objective and unambiguous meaning. For example, a denotative image of a human can be interpreted as a biological entity of *Homo sapiens*. Denotative meanings serve as the basis or foundation for the formation of more complex meanings.

Second, connotation is a second-level system of significance that goes beyond literal meaning (Trimo & Dina, 2022). Signs at this level have indirect meanings, are subjective, and are highly dependent on the reader's interpretation or cultural context (Urfan, 2019). Personal experiences, emotions, cultural values, and the social background of the individual influence this connotative meaning. The connotation is inseparable from the operation of ideology, later called myth (Lasido, 2016). Thus, connotations open space for richer meanings and are full of cultural biases.

Third, the concept of myth is a central element in Barthes' semiotics. The concept of myth is described in the second order of significance, where denotative signs simultaneously serve as connotative markers (Dini & Nandhita, 2023). Myths are not understood as fairy tales but as an ideological discourse that reveals and instills dominant values in a specific period (Farid et al., 2020). Through myths, ideology tends to be naturalized, that is, made as if it is "natural" or

"universal," when in fact it is a social construct that often reflects the interests of the dominant class (Erwan, 2020). The structure of myths also includes three dimensions: markers (denotative signs), signs (ideological concepts), and signs (unity of markers and mythical signs) (Syahriar, 2016).

Based on the background, a problem formulation was obtained about the role and meaning of Bagong in the play of Ki Seno Nugroho's puppet show on the Dalang Seno YouTube channel. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role and meaning of the character Bagong in the play of the puppet show by Ki Seno Nugroho on the Dalang Seno YouTube channel. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method, this study will reveal how Bagong represents social, cultural, and ideological values in contemporary Javanese society. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the study of oral literature and traditional performance, as well as strengthen the position of *wayang kulit* as an adaptive and dynamic cultural communication medium.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach through the Roland Barthes semiotic analysis method. This method consists of two levels, namely denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (cultural and ideological meaning) (Shintya & Reza, 2024). This approach was chosen because of its relevance in unraveling the layers of meaning in a cultural text such as a puppet performance. Thus, this research can reveal what appears on the surface and the deeper cultural and

ideological implications. The primary data in this study is in the form of monologues, dialogues, and non-verbal interactions such as various forms of mimic expressions and gestures of Bagong characters. The data source in this study is the video documentation of Ki Seno Nugroho's performance uploaded on the *Dalang Seno YouTube* channel entitled *Bagong Ratu* (2020) and *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* (2020).

Furthermore, a selection was made of scenes where Bagong appeared dominant. This selection process is crucial to ensure that the analysis focuses on Bagong representation and how Bagong contributes to the delivery of the message. Every aspect of Bagong's performance—from his tone of speech to his hand gestures—is considered a sign full of meaning. The signs are interpreted to reveal the constructed meaning and the ideology conveyed.

These signs are interpreted through two stages to reveal the constructed meaning and ideology conveyed. In the denotation stage, the identification of the literal meaning of dialogues, gestures, and scenes is carried out as the first step to understand the physical and verbal representation of the character. The second stage of analysis is the level of connotation, where cultural and ideological meanings are extracted from the signs that have been identified. The interpretation of this stage involves understanding the Javanese cultural context and the role of Punakawan in society.

Overall, this semiotic research method allows for an in-depth exploration of

Bagong as a sign in Ki Seno Nugroho's puppet performance. The goal is to reveal how signs and meanings are formed through the character of Bagong in the performance of *wayang kulit carangan* by Ki Seno Nugroho, as well as affirm the position of Punakawan as an important narrative device in the play of *wayang kulit carangan*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Bagong as a Representation of the Small People

The play *Bagong Ratu* by Ki Seno Nugroho offers meaning through the signs in Bagong. The figure of Bagong is a complex semiotic sign, representing the collective identity of ordinary people. The name Bagong is taken from the Arabic word "*Baghaa*" which means "rebellious" (Badrun, 2022). This is undoubtedly due to Bagong's character, who always dares to fight injustice and violations of norms, even in a witty way. Furthermore, Barthes's semiotic analysis reveals how the identity of ordinary people is constructed in layers, starting from the level of denotation to the connotations that make up the myth. The analysis, denotatively and connotatively, can be described as follows.

Denotatively, Bagong is depicted with distinctive physical characteristics: a stubborn body, a round face, and an always witty expression. These physical features directly reflect a simple, easily recognizable figure to the general public as part of the ordinary people, not of the aristocracy or knights. A simple Bagong outfit with a topless and collared shirt supports this look. This clearly shows the position of the Bagong as small

people who are far from wearing glittering clothes like the clothes of the knights. However, connotatively, the physical signs of Bagong symbolize the small people who are innocent but honest, critical but still polite, and close to the values of innocent truth, as the character of the small people in general.

Connotatively, the significance of Bagong goes beyond its literal meaning. Bagong symbolizes the innocent but honest little people and is close to the values of innocent truth. This connotation forms a "cultural myth" about the people being "stupid but wise," a paradox prevalent in Javanese thought. This myth asserts that although socially they may be considered undervalued or uneducated, the ordinary people have intuitive wisdom and fundamental honesty that are often overlooked by the upper class. Bagong often shows his ability to see essential but straightforward truths through his dialogues. In several scenes in the play *Bagong Ratu*, Bagong becomes a character who dares to criticize the behavior of knights or rulers, such as when Bagong reprimands Pandawa figures who are busy fighting. Bagong said, "*Wong rebutan kuwasa ki rak koyok rebutan lumbung kosong*" (People who fight for power are like fighting for an empty barn). The speech was not just a joke but a sharp criticism of the political elite who had lost their moral orientation.

Quotes from the Bagong character dialogue in other scenes reinforce the representation of Bagong as a small person. There is a situation in which Bagong comments on political or social situations.

Bagong often uses everyday language that is easy to digest but full of meaning. In a scene where the knights are arguing about a complicated issue, Bagong interrupts with a chatter, "*Lah, nggih kados niki niku kok angel temen, ndara. Sing penting niku lak ya mangan, sing penting ra kelaparan.*" (Well, yes, it is tough like this, sir. The important thing is to eat; the important thing is not to starve). This sentence denotatively only discusses basic needs but connotatively implies criticism of bureaucratic complexity or policies that overlook the fundamental needs of the people.



Picture 1. YouTube Dalang Seno (Bagong Ratu)

The appearance of Bagong's body gestures strengthens the element of connotation as a small person. This can be seen when Bagong speaks. Bagong often scratches his head, waves his hands, or shows a confused facial expression, but an enlightened expression follows. Although seemingly simple, these movements connotatively indicate an honest and authentic thought process, without pretensions or excessive rhetoric. Bagong is a figure who appears without a ring, reflecting the honesty and innocence of the people who are not burdened by rigid formal norms.

Another sign can be seen through Bagong's social interaction with other characters. In interactions, especially with knights or nobles, Bagong is seen as a strong representation of the ordinary people. Bagong did not hesitate to argue with the knights, although he still respected the hierarchy. Bagong is often an unpopular but true "conscience," delivered in a way that invites laughter. Seen in an interaction situation, Bagong asked an arrogant knight, "*Lha njur jenengan niku rak mung bisa ndhawuhi, ndara? Kapan arep melu ngrasakake rekasaning kawula alit?*" (Then the master can only order, right? When do you want to share the plight of the little people?) This rhetorical question, delivered in a humorous tone, connotatively dismantles the distance between the ruler and the people.

Bagong acts as a representation of the collective identity of grassroots communities. Through physical denotations, connotations of values, and manifestations in dialogue, gestures, and interactions, Bagong in Ki Seno Nugroho's performance is not just a comedic character but a strong semiotic sign. Bagong represents the collective identity of the little people, complete with their wisdom, honesty, and critical capacity. The analysis confirms that Bagong has meaning as a cultural myth about a "stupid but wise" people. This reflects the small people's collective identity, which remains relevant in the current social and political context.

Bagong as an Entertainer and Critic of Power

One of Bagong's strengths in Ki Seno Nugroho's performance is the ability to convey social criticism humorously. Ki Seno Nugroho made Bagong an alternative discourse channel that voiced social inequality, corruption, poverty, and state policies that were not on the side of the people. The criticism was delivered in an egalitarian and familiar style so that it did not cause resistance but aroused the audience. Bagong commented sarcastically about the convoluted village bureaucracy: *"Ngurus surat wae nganti entek dhahar siang, padahal mung arep ngurus tandha tangan."* This sentence is denotatively just a funny complaint, but connotatively, it symbolizes the inefficiency of the local bureaucracy experienced by the community. Through this technique, Ki Seno entertains and builds collective awareness through social reflection.

Bagong occupies the primary function in the play by Ki Seno Nugroho. Bagong plays the role of a comedian and serves as an expressive medium containing various cultural meanings. Bagong effectively became an informal and powerful means of mass communication. As part of Punakawan, Bagong not only plays a funny function but also voices sharp social criticism and conveys the values of people's wisdom. This dual role makes Bagong a sign that plays a dual role as an entertainer and an agent of social and moral change. The humor brought by Bagong is not just a tool to dilute the atmosphere but an effective cultural communication strategy. In the Javanese tradition, speaking

straightforwardly is often considered disrespectful. So, humor is a middle way to convey important messages without offending directly.



Picture 2. YouTube Dalang Seno (*Semar Mbangun Kayangan*)

Bagong conveyed criticism through humor. However, it is not uncommon for Bagong to face threats from offended rulers. As in the play *Semar Mbangun Kayangan*, Prabu Baladewa was offended when Bagong criticized Prabu Kresna, his younger brother. And then he turned to him and said, *"Kowe kuwi sapa, drajatmu kuwi apa? Ing atase mung batur aturmu dlangap-dlangap kaya grojokan, kowe wani ngiyas marang nata Dwarawati, kuwi adhiku. Yen pancen kowe wani ayo metu njaba."* (Who are you, what is your status? You are just a maid. Your talk is nonsensical, as if there is no rule, you dare to approach the king of Dwarawati, my sibling. If you truly dare, let us step outside). In response to this challenge, Bagong said humorously, *"Metu kok nang njaba, metu kuwi nang njero."* (Why go outside, going out is inside). Thus, humor is a complement and the core of a narrative

strategy that blends aesthetics and social criticism.

Denotatively, Bagong is used as a symbolic medium of resistance against social inequality and injustice. Bagong always appears with criticism, which is often conveyed through subtle innuendo, straightforward talk, and breaking up the tense atmosphere, but the essence is very touching. There was an incident when Prabu Krishna, as a knight figure, showed arrogance and policies that were detrimental to the people. Bagong responded with a seemingly innocent comment that contained deep irony. In a tone that sounded innocent but sarcastic, Bagong interrupted in a dialogue, "*Sinuwun, gedhene bangunan niku boten jaminan wetenge rakyat bisa wareg. Wong cilik niku butuhe mung sega sak piring, boten tugu sing dhuwur-dhuwur.*" (Sir, the size of the building does not guarantee that people's stomachs can be full. The small people only need a plate of rice, not a tall monument). This dialogue denotatively speaks of basic needs versus splendor, but connotatively is a scathing critique of development priorities that are not pro-people.

In addition to the function of social criticism, Bagong also plays a role as a conveyor of local wisdom in communicative and entertaining packaging. Bagong is often depicted by quoting Javanese proverbs or traditional advice relevant to the current context, but not in a patronizing way. Bagong bridges traditional values with contemporary realities through a folk style and fresh humor, ensuring local wisdom remains alive and relevant amid changing times. There was a

situation when the puppet characters were hit by moral confusion or difficulties in making decisions; Bagong threw out wise advice taken from Javanese *unen-unen* (expressions). "*Ndara, urip niku mung sawang sinawang. Kadang sing ketoke penak durung mesti penak, kadang sing ketoke rekasa niku malah nggawa berkah. Sing penting niku aja lali karo Gusti, lan eling marang sedulur.*" (Sir, life is just the way it seems. Sometimes what seems reasonable is not necessarily good; sometimes what seems complicated brings blessings. The important thing is not to forget God and remember your fellow brothers). Denotatively, the quote can be interpreted literally. However, connotatively, the phrase encapsulates the philosophical essence of simplicity, gratitude, and the importance of solidarity.

In the Ki Seno Nugroho performance, Bagong serves as a mouthpiece for the people's voice, a polite medium for criticism, and a preservationist of local wisdom. Bagong is a bridge between power and the people, between tradition and modernity. This role of Bagong confirms that *wayang kulit*, through Punakawan characters such as Bagong, remains a vital platform to effectively reflect and communicate cultural and social values in the community.

Bagong as a Cultural Communicator: Local Wisdom amid Modernity

The *Wayang kulit Carangan* performance by Ki Seno Nugroho is not just the preservation of traditional art but an innovation that affirms its relevance as a medium of cultural communication in the modern era. The plays

are not tied to the Mahabharata or Ramayana narrative packages, providing Ki Seno ample creative freedom to integrate contemporary issues. This flexibility of the narrative allows adaptation to current social, political, and economic realities so that the show not only preserves tradition but also serves as a dynamic and relevant forum for social dialogue for its audience.

Ki Seno Nugroho intelligently utilizes the potential of the play to ground actual messages through folk figures such as Bagong. With all his innocence and honesty, Bagong's character becomes an effective medium to convey social and moral criticism without seeming patronizing. This ability is the key to the relevance of Ki Seno Nugroho's puppet about people's daily problems with easy-to-digest language and fresh humor, making complex messages more accessible. Speaking about the new variant in the series, he said, "*Lha kok akeh banget toh, ndara, sing padha kemaruk bandha. Padahal niku dudu dhuwite dhewe, niku dhuwite rakyat. Mangke nek wis tumplek-blek, digeret malaikat, njur arep nggawa apa?*" (Lha, why are there so many, sir, who are greedy for wealth? Even though it is not his money, it is the people's money. Later, when he dies, he will be pulled by the angels then. What do you want to bring?) This dialogue denotatively talks about greed for wealth, but connotatively criticizes corrupt practices and reminds us of moral accountability.

In addition, using digital media, especially YouTube channels, is a key strategy for Ki Seno Nugroho to expand the reach of

wayang kulit. Ki Seno Nugroho's puppet performance videos on online platforms allow a broader audience, across generations and geographies, to access and enjoy puppets. This phenomenon proves that *wayang kulit* has excellent potential to continue to adapt and develop beyond the geographical boundaries and traditional performance times. It also shows how traditional art can collaborate with modern technology to stay relevant.

Ki Seno Nugroho's style in presenting Bagong also contributes to the relevance of *wayang kulit* as a communication medium. Bagong is displayed in dialogue, intonation, gestures, and even direct interaction with the audience (albeit through a recording screen). For example, Bagong's facial expressions change from witty to serious when delivering important advice, and his expressive hand gestures when criticizing all add weight to the message being conveyed. This strengthens the position of Punakawan, especially Bagong, as a narrative structure rich in meaning in the dynamics of contemporary Javanese art. Bagong is not just a narrative complement but an expressive medium that contains various layers of cultural meaning and becomes a bridge between tradition and modernity. Punakawan, through Bagong, is a "spokesperson" for noble values that must be constantly reminded to the community.

Ki Seno Nugroho uses the character of Bagong to laugh at collective stupidity, social irony, and even societal fatalism. Bagong humor is often intertextual, citing contemporary realities such as television advertisements, social media phenomena, and

local political events. This strategy allows puppet performances to reach a broader range of society, including the younger generation. The entire performance of Ki Seno Nugroho's *carangan*, with the character of Bagong as the center, reflects the ability of *wayang kulit* to dialogue with its time. *Wayang* is no longer just a museum piece or ancient spectacle, but a medium that is alive, responsive, and adaptive to social change. This is proof that traditional art can remain relevant and have universal appeal. Thus, this article underlines that Ki Seno Nugroho's puppet, through its representation and communication function, is a tangible example of how traditional performing arts can continue transforming and maintaining their role as a vital cultural communication medium. Bagong preserves art, actively forms awareness, and responds to social issues, making *wayang kulit* an inseparable part of the national narrative and people's lives.

Through the play *Carangan* and the character of Bagong, Ki Seno succeeded in actualizing the values of local wisdom in the context of popular culture. Bagong intonation, gestures, and social interaction effectively reinforce the delivery of philosophical and moral messages. Bagong's facial expressions that change from witty to serious, or his expressive hand gestures, add dimension to every word spoken. Bagong speaks and "stages" the wisdom itself, making it easy to accept and digest by audiences from various backgrounds. Bagong carries the message of honesty, justice, populism, and simplicity, which are the foundation of Javanese cultural

values. In Barthes' semiotics, these values appear as connotations of various signs, from Bagong's speech and voice intonation to his interaction with other characters.

Ki Seno's performance maintains traditions and negotiates new meanings relevant to contemporary social conditions. The character of Bagong becomes a bridge between the mythological world and the real world, between the plot and improvisation, and between heritage and innovation. The ideology is not hegemonic but participatory: the audience is not patronized but invited to laugh and think together.

CONCLUSION

The character of Bagong in the puppet show Ki Seno Nugroho is not just a narrative complement but an expressive medium that contains various layers of cultural meaning. Through Barthes' semiotic approach, this analysis shows that Bagong represents the voice of the small people who are critical but witty, philosophical but straightforward. Bagong is not only a comedian but also a communicator of social criticism, an affirmer of local wisdom values, and a link between tradition and contemporary reality. Bagong also often uses humor as a tool to convey messages that can build social awareness.

The *carangan* performance by Ki Seno Nugroho shows that *wayang kulit* is still very relevant as a medium of cultural communication. By utilizing the character of Bagong as a symbol and narrative strategy, Ki Seno Nugroho conveys social messages in a communicative, entertaining, and reflective

way. This research strengthens the position of Punakawan, especially Bagong, as a narrative structure rich in meaning in the dynamics of contemporary Javanese art.

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