

Telling and selling

Literary fiction in early Malay language newspapers in colonial Indonesia

JOACHIM NIEß

ABSTRACT

When newspapers in the colloquial Malay language appeared in the Dutch East Indies in the middle of the nineteenth century, they did more than just publish news reports and advertisements. They also created a new platform for the telling and distribution of literary fiction. In effect, literary texts soon played an important role in the vernacular print media. The first part of this article analyses the attraction of newspaper literature from the perspective of both the reader and the editor in general and gives a survey of the various forms of literary genres which can be found in newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the second part, one particular serialized novel will be discussed in detail to demonstrate how the mode of publication also influenced the way stories were told.

KEYWORDS

Indonesia; literary fiction; media; newspapers; Surabaya.

INTRODUCTION¹

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Dutch East Indies, especially the main island Java, underwent a drastic change on many levels whose after-effects were felt in the social, economic, technological and cultural

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JOACHIM NIEß obtained a Magister Artium (MA) in Indonesian Philology, Art History and German Literature from the University of Cologne in 2010. Currently he is an associated researcher and PhD candidate in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies of the Goethe University Frankfurt. His PhD project is about the serialized novels and other types of literature which appeared in Malay-language newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in colonial Indonesia. Joachim Nieß can be contacted at: j.niess@em.uni-frankfurt.de.

fields. The population of Java (including Madura) almost tripled in only half a century, increasing from about 9.5 million in 1850 to about 28 million in 1900 (Ricklefs 2001: 158, 197). This population surge was not confined to the native population, it was also experienced among the European and the Chinese groups. The abolition of the Cultivation System and the passing of the Agrarian Law of 1870 signalled the beginning of a free market which made the colonies more attractive to private investment (Ricklefs 2001: 161). Also important to both the demographic and the economic changes were the introduction of such new infrastructural and transportation technologies as steamships and trains in the second half of the nineteenth century (Campo 2002; Veenendaal 2008). These modes of transport shortened distances within and between the islands, cities, and towns of the colony, they also cut the distances between the colony and other parts of the world, especially after the Suez Canal opened in 1869. The world became smaller during this period and the telegraph, another technological innovation, helped to facilitate the exchange of ideas and information between different parts of the globe to a higher degree (Houben 2008: 27-28).

One contemporary product which benefited more than any other from these changes was the newspaper. In fact, newspapers are not only products of this era of change, they can also be seen as one of the best witnesses to this process. The first vernacular newspaper was the Javanese weekly *Bromartani* founded in 1855. However, eschewing its choice of language, most pioneering newspapers and journals opted for another language in which to communicate: Malay (Ahmat Adam 1995: 19-22). Malay had been in use as a *lingua franca* throughout the whole Malay Archipelago including Java for centuries, especially in places in which the exchange between different cultures was more intense than elsewhere: cities and towns located on the north coast of Java, the hubs of commercial (and like cultural) exchange. These were the places in which an "imagined community" came into being, a process supported to some degree by the vernacular newspapers (Anderson 1991: 38-41). The factor most of these newspapers had in common – besides their preference for colloquial variants of Malay – was the comparatively large amount of literature published in them.² Almost every newspaper contained some degree of literary fiction: *syairs*, other poems, novels or shorter prose texts in serialized forms: some borrowed from previously published books, some translations or adaptations of foreign language texts and some written exclusively for publication in a newspaper. As will be discussed, especially in issues which were published in the first decade of the twentieth century, the amount of literary fiction was extraordinarily high, in some issues sometimes even surpassing the content of "factual" reports on current events.

In this article, I would like to discuss the role literary fiction played in early Malay language newspapers in Java up to the beginning of the twentieth century by examining their conditions of production and distribution and

² See, for instance: A. Wahab Ali (1991: 49-59), Ahmat Adam (1995: 26, 36, 44-45); Pramodya Ananta Toer (1982: 1-15); Maier (1997); Proudfoot (2007); Watson (1971: 419-424).

by providing a survey of the different types and genres of literature in newspapers. For this purpose, I shall mainly focus on one newspaper, *Bintang Soerabaia* (Star of Surabaya). In the second part of this article, I am going to present a text which was published in this newspaper as a serialized story in 1902/03. Since this text was specially written as a serial in a newspaper, I shall raise questions about whether the circumstances under which these specific publications were produced also influenced the text itself, affecting both the narration form and the content.

HOW TO RUN A NEWSPAPER

One city which probably profited more than any other from these transformation processes was Surabaya. Thanks to technological and infrastructural investments, greatly assisted by the sugar-cane boom, this town on the north coast of Java was transformed into a genuine boom town in the course of the nineteenth century. With about 150,000 inhabitants in 1905, making it the largest population in the Dutch East Indies, it was even bigger than the capital Batavia (Dick 2002: 120). Hence, it was a good place to find readers for a newspaper. It is therefore no wonder that it became the hometown of one of the longest running newspapers in colonial Indonesia, *Bintang Soerabaia*. Its immediate predecessor, *Bintang Timor* (initially spelled *Bientang Timoor* = Star of the East) had already been established by the publishing company Gebroeder Gimberg & Co. in 1862. Although *Bintang Timor* was only published twice a week (on Wednesday and Saturday) during its first two decades, in 1882 it was turned into a newspaper which was published daily except on Sundays and public holidays; the first of its kind in the Indies. In 1887, only one year after the new owner, a Chinese businessmen, Tjoa Tjoan Lok, had purchased the publishing firm at auction, the publication was renamed *Bintang Soerabaia*. The deal included the licence to continue the newspaper.³ It was only in 1924, after having run for more than six decades, that *Bintang Soerabaia* ceased publication. Hence, it can be said that *Bintang Soerabaia* had already had a long – and compared to many other, rather ephemeral organs – successful history when, on 2 September 1899, the article entitled “Dari hal mengarang soerat kabar” (About the compiling of newspapers) was published. In one and a half columns, an anonymous writer offers his thoughts on the day-to-day work of the editor and on the image of journalists in the eyes of the public. He thought this image inaccurate since most people wrongly assumed that compiling newspapers was an easy job:

Adapoen banjak orang jang soeka batja soerat kabar ada kira, bahoewa hal mengarang soerat kabar ada soewatoe kerdja'an, jang gampang sekali, tetapi orang ini barangkali tiada tahoe bebrapa banjak moesoeh, poesing kepala dan tjape hati boewat satoe Redacteur, aken moewat tiap tiap hari soerat kabarnya dengan roepa roepa pekabaran atawa tjerita jang berfaedah bagi pematja. (Bintang Soerabaia, 2-9-1899).

³ This incident was important insofar as it opened up the era of Chinese participation in the Indonesian newspaper business (Ahmat Adam 1995: 64).

Many people who like to read newspapers think that compiling a newspaper is a very easy job. However, these people certainly have no idea how much struggle, headache and effort it requires for an editor to fill the newspaper with various news or stories which will benefit its readers every day.

Even though these and the following lines were clearly intended to be humorous, they do provide an insight into the difficulties contemporary editors in the Dutch East Indies had to overcome to produce a daily newspaper. The main challenge, to put it simply, was to find enough content every day to fill the paper's pages with texts in which the readers would – presumably – be interested.

As the journalist declares in the course of his article, one could, of course, simply borrow contents from other newspapers to fill the pages. However, if this is done too extensively, the product might be robbed of its specific character and become indistinguishable:

Betoel, apabila satoe Redacteur tiada poenja banjak pekabaran sendiri aken di moewat di soerat kabarnja, maka dia bolih petik pekabaran dari lain lain soerat kabar, tetapi pakerdja'an ini tiada bolih di djalanken saben hari dan sabolih bolih djangan di djalanken, krana karangan sendiri, itoelah jang bikin haroem dan masjoehoer soerat kabarnja. (Bintang Soerabaia, 2-9-1899).

Of course, should an editor have not enough of his own news to fill the newspaper, he can simply borrow articles from other newspapers. But it is not possible to do this every day and it should be avoided, because it is actually original texts which make the newspaper's name and reputation.

It is somewhat ironic that these lines appeared in the newspaper *Bintang Soerabaia* – an organ which did in fact borrow material rather extensively from other newspapers, both Dutch and Malay language ones. Its irony deepens when one recognizes that even this article is just a reprint from a text which had already been published in another newspaper, namely, in the Batavia-based *Bintang Betawi* (Star of Betawi), as it is clearly stated above the headline of the contribution: “Petikan dari Bintang Betawi” (Quoted from *Bintang Betawi*). However, at the end of the nineteenth century the process of producing a newspaper in Batavia was not very different from the process in Surabaya. It was a time in which editors had to manage almost everything themselves “from proofreading to collecting advertisements”, to cite Ahmat Adam (1995: 47). The difficulties were the same and the major headache was simply to fill the pages with new textual material every day. This material should contain new information and it should be interesting, nevertheless in descriptions of conditions in the colony the contents should not be too critical. The Dutch had kept a weather-eye on what was written in the vernacular press ever since the first newspapers began to be printed in the 1850s. This alertness was given a concrete form in the *Drukpersreglement* (Press Regulations Law) passed in 1857, which in fact was nothing more than an instrument of censorship (Ahmat Adam 1995: 14-15; Maters 1998: 45-49; Termorshuizen 2001: 75-82). Writing

too critically could provoke a publication ban for a certain period or even less favourable consequences as described in the following lines by the writings of the anonymous journalist:

Apabila Redacteur brani toelis barang jang betoel lantao orang kata Redacteur poenja bisa sendiri. / Kaloe Redacteur masoek boei lantaran menoelis apa apa maka orang kata Redacteur itoe bodo sekali dan apabila Redacteur takoet menoelis apa apa lantao di seboet jang Redacteur itoe seperti poentoeng api jang tiada bergoena. (Bintang Soerabaia, 2-9-1899).

If an editor is brave enough to write the truth, people will immediately say that he is really competent. / But when an editor is sent to prison because he has written something or other, people say he must be very stupid. And if an editor is afraid to write something, it is immediately said that this editor is like a spent matchstick.

Publishing more news from abroad instead seems to have been less problematic. However, for such reports the vernacular newspapers were mainly reliant on what the Dutch-language newspapers published. News agencies did not yet exist and not only was the technology of the telegraph rather expensive, its use was restricted to Europeans (Houben 2008: 28). Consequently, news from abroad could usually only be presented with a delay of at least one day, usually more.

Bearing these circumstances in mind, one reason for the comparatively large role of literary fiction in early Indonesian newspapers can simply be assumed to be technical: publishing serialized literature facilitated the editors' daily task of finding enough material to publish. Contrary to news reports which naturally had to deal with most recent topics, texts of literary fictions could be prepared in advance and published in increments – with the length of the texts depending on the space which had to be filled in the new edition.

This stratagem especially applies to *Bintang Soerabaia* in which the space reserved for literature was not restricted as it was in some other newspapers. In *Bintang Betawi*, for instance, the novel had its fixed place on the front page, separated from the rest of the newspaper by a line. In contrast, *Bintang Soerabaia* placed the literary texts in regular columns, right in between news reports and articles. This layout meant that the length of instalments which were published could easily be varied from day to day. Sometimes an episode filled only one column on a page, sometimes two or three, and sometimes even more than one page was completely taken up by the serial. Moreover, *Bintang Soerabaia* did not usually restrict itself to one literary text, it could carry at least two or even more which ran parallel in both the regular part of the newspaper and on the additional sheets.⁴ Should it happen that there

⁴ It should be noted that the content of these early newspapers was rather meagre. Early issues of *Bintang Timor* consisted of only one sheet of paper which was folded once and printed on both sides – resulting in four pages. At least two of them were reserved for advertisements. Later *Bintang Timor* (and *Bintang Soerabaia*) usually consisted of eight, and sometimes (on Saturdays and Wednesdays) twelve pages, advertisements still making up half the content. The rest of the space was reserved for articles, news reports, contributions by the readers – and other text types, among them literary fiction.

was more than enough news to report, a serial was interrupted for a day or more. This happened in 1914 when World War I produced a flood of news about the events in Europe and the consequences for the Dutch East Indies. Although the war soon also served as a topic of literary fiction published in the newspaper, one of these serials, a story entitled *Hikajat spion peprangan Jules Verbeeke satoe hikajat dari peprangan tahoen 1914*, sometimes had to be put on hold.⁵ Readers were informed with the following words:

Lantaran banjak pekabaran jang beloem dapet tempat, maka tjeritanja JULES VERBEEKE ini hari kita toenda sampe besook pagi. Harep pematja mendjadi tahoe. Red. (Bintang Soerabaia, 25-11-1914).

Because there is so much news which has not yet found place, the story of JULES VERBEEKE will be postponed until tomorrow morning. Readers kindly take note. The Editors.

In fact, the same serial was cancelled another time for a rather curious reason, likewise explained to the readers in a separate announcement:

Lantaran kita poenja ko[e]ntji kemaren ketinggal dikantor, mendjadi kita tida bisa ambil boeat menjalin boekoe tjritanja Jules Verbeeke jang ada dalem kita poenja lemari di roemah, sehingga itoe hikajat aken kita masoekken besook pagi sadja. Red. (Bintang Soerabaia, 22-1-1915).

Because our key was left behind at the office yesterday, we were not able to translate the book of the story of Jules Verbeeke which is kept in our cupboard at home. Hence, we shall include the story again tomorrow morning. The Editors.

As peculiar as these notices might seem at first glance, they do provide us with an important insight into the status of these literary instalments: obviously these serials were highly anticipated by the readers who expected to find them in the newspapers. The editors therefore deemed it necessary to make a special announcement if an instalment could not be published.

Viewed from this angle, literature was obviously more than a kind of "filler" to avoid empty space on the newspaper pages (an important fact since in these early newspapers there were usually no photographs or illustrations which could be inserted). Literature can also be seen as an instrument the newspapers used to make themselves more attractive to their subscribers. Like almost all newspapers from this pioneering era in Indonesian mass media history, rather than being idealistic *Bintang Timor* and its successor, *Bintang Soerabaia*, were profit-oriented enterprises.⁶ Generally speaking,

⁵ This serial is a translation based on a contemporary Dutch booklet series about a doctor and spy in German-occupied Belgium by Dewael-Grootenburg (*Jules Verbeeke, De oorlogs-spion; Oorspronkelijk verhaal van den wereldoorlog van 1914*).

⁶ What Maier (1993: 132) writes about the Batavian-based publisher Albrecht & Co. applies equally well to the publishing house of *Bintang Soerabaia*: "Companies like Albrecht had one thing in common: they all operated within a socioeconomic system which was increasingly

there were two streams of income for newspapers which were more or less intertwined with each other: subscriptions and advertisements. In contrast to European newspapers which were usually sold in shops or directly on the street, newspapers in the Indies were not sold by street vendors; they had to be paid for by subscription (Ahmat Adam 1995: 49).⁷ This model allowed the newspaper producers to accumulate capital in advance to pay for their materials and staff – plus whatever else was needed to produce and distribute their product. As it were, it guaranteed them a certain latitude in planning. A high (and stable) number of subscribers was also important to make the advertising space more attractive to potential clients.

Publishing literature in a serialized form was more than a ploy to keep their subscribers (since they were interested in knowing how a story would proceed and in finding out which story would be published next), it also helped to attract new readers. It allowed newspapers to acquire “exclusive” content; material which was different to that of other newspapers in the same city – their aim with most news reports. Hence, the serials can be considered a kind of “unique selling point” for the newspapers. This function of serial novels as a marketing tool is even more obvious when we take a look at Table 1 which lists the percentage of literature in four specific years (based on statistics for the month of May) in combination with the number of vernacular newspapers in circulation:⁸

Year	1874	1884	1894	1904
Percentage of literature in <i>Bintang Timor</i> / <i>Bintang Soerabaia</i> in May	1	5	4	30
Malay newspapers in circulation in Java ⁹	5	9	10	25

Table 1. Percentage of literature in newspapers and number of newspapers in Java.

It is obvious that *Bintang Timor* / *Bintang Soerabaia* always carried a literary content and the early issues of *Bintang Timor* already contained serialized novels, shorter prose texts and *syairs*. However, initially literature played only a minor role. Fictional texts were included rather sporadically and, even

ruled by the power of money and profit. These were entrepreneurs in culture, so to say; selecting their products on the basis of possible commercial value rather than idealistic considerations, they sold them wherever they could”.

⁷ Of course, it is also possible that the newspapers were resold at the market, but this was obviously not the intention of the publishing houses. This can be concluded from the fact that no newspaper mentions the price of a single issue.

⁸ The percentage of literature is measured purely in the space covered by ‘literary’ texts on the newspaper’s pages (excluding advertisements and the masthead), based upon statistics which were compiled by evaluating one month (May). Please note, that these data are part of an ongoing research project and still preliminary. More detailed statistics will be part of my PhD thesis. It should also be noted that especially for the issues at the time when *Bintang Timor* still appeared only twice a week, some issues contained more literature than others.

⁹ The numbers for newspapers are based on Ahmat Adam (1995: 184-191) and include only newspapers actually in circulation in the years examined.

as late as May 1874, they represented only about one per cent of what was printed in total. Ten years later, in 1884, the percentage had risen to about five per cent – a development which seems to have been related to the fact that the newspaper had changed its mode of publication two years earlier in 1882 when it began to be published on a daily basis. The inevitable upshot was that more textual material was needed to fill the pages within a shorter period of time. Moreover, the growing competition with other newspapers might have also played a role, since *Bintang Timor* now had to share the market with ten competitors, including one in the same town.¹⁰ At the dawn of the twentieth century, this competition increased and then, in 1904, the portion of literature makes up an average share of thirty per cent of the content. The table shows that the increase in the volume of fictional texts ran parallel to the rise in number of competitors. Whereas *Bintang Timor* had to struggle with only four competitors in Java in 1874, in 1904 *Bintang Soerabaia* was confronted with twenty-five newspapers vying to win readers.¹¹

Needless to say, the growing importance of literature is also an indicator of a generally growing interest in (and demand for) reading fiction – a development reflected in the expanding production of Malay-language books by contemporary publishing houses (Maier 1993). Importantly, compared to books it is fair to say that novels serialized in the press were a fairly reasonably priced form of entertainment. Therefore, it is worth taking a look at the subscription rates. The prices of *Bintang Timor* / *Bintang Soerabaia* remained notably stable after it changed its mode of publishing to a daily one in 1882. Until the second decade of the twentieth century, it cost 20.00 guilders per annum for roughly 300 issues (365 days excluding Sundays and holidays), hence each issue cost less than 7 cents.¹² Reasonable though this price was, it must be considered that even this sum was unaffordable for everyone living in the Indies. Unquestionably the people who read newspapers were fairly well-off and belonged to the elite or at least “upper middle class”. This fact is supported by a glance at the advertisements for “luxury products” in the newspapers: be these an advertisement for food from the Netherlands (*biefstuk* and *ham*), cosmetics from France (*Parfumerie Ed. Pinaud*) or beverages from Germany (*Erlanger Exportbier* and *Apollinaris*). Newspaper advertisements not only cast a revealing light on the composition of their readership (for example, in terms of social status and ethnicity), they also offer a context for examining the actual price of the newspaper in relation with other goods. Moreover, since publishing houses were also eager to promote their new books there (knowing that they would attract the attention of the literate public), this section is even

¹⁰ In 1884 this was *Tjahaja Moelia* (published by Donker Bros. & Co from 1883 to 1884).

¹¹ *Bintang Soerabaia*'s direct competitor in Surabaya was *Pewarta Soerabaja* (founded in 1903). A third newspaper (*Primbon Soerabaja*) ceased publication in 1903.

¹² The subscription usually ran for half a year (from January to June, and from July to December), but it was also possible to pay the full annual price in one go. Nevertheless, from time to time when the editors were actively seeking new readers (and capital), they would announce that in the meantime subscriptions could be taken for shorter periods of three or four months.

more relevant in this context.

The issue of *Bintang Soerabaia* of 18 August, 1900, provides a good example. It praises a new subscription for the daily on the title page, in this case f. 6.75 for four months (Illustration 1), it also contains an advertisement, placed by a certain Mr Kommer¹³ from Meester Cornelis, in which he offers some books for sale (Illustration 2):

di kloewarken tiga vel.

f 6.75

dengan kirim oewangnja

ORANG BOLIH BELI SOERAT KABAR

Bintang Soerabaia

Moelai dari 1 September sampe pengabisan boelan December 1900 soeda bolih trima moelai ini hari.

GEBR. GIMBERG & CO.

Illustration 1. Subscription rate on the title page of the *Bintang Soerabaia* (18-8-1900).

H. W. SAND.

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BOLIH DAPET BELI

Dengen harga **CONTANT**

Boekoe tjerita	Nji Painah	f 0,80
id id	Siti Aisah	f 0,55
id id	Kong Hong Nio	f 1,00
id id	Si Tjonat	f 1,00

Semoewa tjerita ini betoei soeda terdjadi di tanah Djawa beloem sebrapa lamaanja, la zipoen tjeritanja amat loetjoe, haroes d'oeawat nasehat.

Tinggal sedikit sadja! Lekas beli sebeloenja abis terdjoewal.

Di minta djangan bajar dengan kepala radja (franco) sebab soeka lengket satoe pada lain hingga djadi roesak. Lebih baik kirim wisse!

KOMMER

Meester Cornelis

984

1899
1892
1898

Dianjan loena sama KIEERMAKER

Illustration 2. Advertisement for books in the *Bintang Soerabaia* (18-8-1900).

The prices range from f. 0.55 for the shorter story of *Siti Aisah* to f. 1.60 for the stories *Kong Hong Nio* and *Si Tjonat*. The latter two examples especially provide a good benchmark since both texts were also published in *Bintang Soerabaia* as serialized novels – in the same year the advertisement was placed. Translated into numbers: taking *Si Tjonat* as a reference a daily newspaper for one month cost as much as one small booklet of 126 pages. Its serialization in the newspaper lasted only slightly longer than one month, namely: from 28 February to 6 April 1900. In short, subscribing to a newspaper was indeed an inexpensive (and comfortable) way of gaining access to literature.¹⁴

By now it should be obvious that literary fiction was very important to

¹³ H. Kommer (1900) was also the author of three books in the advertisement: *Nji Painah*, *Siti Aisah*, and *Tjerita Kong Hong Nio*, the last one being an adaptation of a Dutch tale by W.L. Ritter (Arens 1999: 36). The fourth book, *Si Tjonat*, is also based on a work by Ritter 1861 (Arens 1999: 36) and was translated into Malay for *Bintang Betawi* by F.D.J. Pangemanann (1900).

¹⁴ Newspapers also offered good value for money compared to private lending libraries which still offered manuscripts in the era of the printing press. According to Chambert-Loir (1991: 92), the lending fee for a *syair*, for instance, was 10 cents a day, as mentioned in a manuscript of the scribe Muhammad Bakir from 1894.

early Indonesian newspapers for both logistical and marketing reasons. In what follows, I would like to explain in more detail the terms “literature” respectively “literary fiction” by giving some examples of texts which were published in *Bintang Soerabaia*.

LITERATURE IN NEWSPAPERS

When talking about literary fiction in the context of newspapers, it is important to distinguish between at least two different categories. In a broader sense “newspaper literature” refers to all sorts of texts which have “literary” aspect (encompassing both poetry and prose) and appear in a newspaper – irrespective of their origin and whether they had been intentionally created for publication in this medium or had simply been adopted from another context and made suitable (for instance, by shortening them or dividing them into episodes for a serialized presentation). In the stricter sense, the term refers only to texts which have been deliberately produced with the intention of publishing them in a newspaper. The latter type can be seen as the genuine “newspaper literature”, a text genre in its own right (Bachleitner 2012: 8).

On balance, it must be stated that most texts published in *Bintang Soerabaia* probably belong to the first category; “probably” because it is difficult to determine whether a text had been published elsewhere before it made it into the newspaper. To give an example, a serial which appeared in *Bintang Soerabaia* in 1904 entitled “Hikajat Raden Agoes” (The tale of Raden Agoes) was actually a reprint of a story published in book form by the Indo-European J. E. Hooff in 1899 with the title “Tjarita Raden Soekarman” (The story of Raden Soekarman). For publication in the daily only the title and, consequently, the name of the protagonist had been altered.¹⁵ Apart from such fairly unknown works which can be traced as adaptations from other contexts only by sheer serendipity, there are many texts which are obvious adaptations, since they were based on better known works or they admit their origin themselves by mentioning an author or a source. In this category of texts alone, the variety of text types from most different writing traditions presented in the same newspaper (alternating or even side by side) is enormous. To illustrate this, a selection of texts which were published in one single year, 1905, will be set out below.

In 1905 works from the heritage of classical Malay literature, both poetry and prose, were still appearing in serialized form in the newspaper. The *syair* was the most common type of poetry in Classical Malay and, at the beginning of

¹⁵ See Jedamski (2009: 178-179) for a similar case where Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* was retold under a new title (as well as with a differently named protagonist) in *Bintang Soerabaia*. See Sykorsky (1980: 504-505) for a short notice on Hooff’s *Raden Soekarman* which is in fact a detective story set in the *Kraton* of Kartasoera. Another, rather humorous story by Hooff (*Tjerita Prampoean Pandai* = The Story of the Wise Woman) was published in the same year by the same publisher (Tjoe Toei Yang, Batavia). Later, Hooff turned to crime and was convicted of fraud. He escaped from prison before being arrested again. Details can be found in Dutch and Malay newspapers from 1912 and 1913, among them a wanted description with details of his appearance (*Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 14-02-1913). His life seems to be a story of its own, probably no less entertaining than his fictional writings.

the era of the printing press in the second half of the nineteenth century, these poems, which were quite often narrative and consisted of an undefined number of quatrains following the rhyme scheme a-a-a-a, were still a definite part of the most popular reading material in the Malay language world (Proudfoot 1993: 29). Therefore it is no wonder that *syairs* also appeared quite regularly in early Malay-language newspapers in the Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1905, for example, the *Syair Yatim Nestapa* (here spelled “Sjair Jatim Moesthapa” = Poem about an Unfortunate Orphan), a narrative poem based on motifs from Panji tales and most likely composed by an anonymous poet in nineteenth-century Riau (Braginsky 2004: 506), was published in *Bintang Soerabaia* as a serial. Apart from such reprints, the pages of the newspaper sometimes also contained *syairs* on more recent topics, specifically written for publication in newspapers. Quite often, the readers themselves sent in letters to the editors in the form of poems which had been composed for special occasions, for instance, the beginning of a new year. On 4 January, 1905, a poem in this category was published in *Bintang Soerabaia*. It bore the longish title “Sjair Slamet Tahoen Baroe boeat membantoe sekalian padoeka toean redacteur srenta toko Gebr. Gimberg & Co.” (A Happy New Year Poem in support of all the editors and the business of Gebr. Gimberg & Co.), in which a reader gives his thanks to the editors of the newspaper, simultaneously managing to ensure that the initial letters of each line taken as a whole form the sentence “Saja njang nama Soeloewan membrie slamet tahoen baroe” (I, whose name is Soeloewan, wish you a happy new year).

Of the prose works from the Classical Malay heritage, *hikayats* were the genre published most regularly. In 1905, for instance, we find a version of the “Hikayat Merong Mahwangsa” (The tale of Merong Mahawangsa)¹⁶ and episodes from the “Hikayat Hang Tuah” (The tale of Hang Tuah)¹⁷ – the latter forming an undisputed perennial favourite throughout the history of the newspaper, with excerpts appearing several times in different editions, even in the form of a serialized *pantun* in November 1884.¹⁸ It is important to note that, at this time, the term *hikayat* was no longer restricted to its traditional meaning of heroic prose epics, it also served to designate prose works in general. Consequently, translations of Western novels were also usually labelled *hikayat* (as will be shown in the following). Shorter prose texts, which seem to have had more in common with *ceritas* (stories), were also sometimes categorized as *hikayat* in their title or subtitle. These inconstancies should be

¹⁶ “Hikajat merang maha wangsa. Di salin dari soewatoe kitab melajoe oleh boengah meloer” (*Bintang Soerabaia*, a.o. 16-3-1905).

¹⁷ “Hikajat ‘Hang Tuah’ amat rame. Di salin dari kitab ‘Taman Melajoe’ Arab oleh Atji Atji. Bintang Soerabaia” (*Bintang Soerabaia*, a.o. 19-6-1905.).

¹⁸ “Pantoen hiekaijat Hangtoewah, karangannja Radhen Sosrosepoetro die Soerabaija. [Tertjangkok darie boekoe almanak melajoe tahoen 1884, njang die karangken oleh toean F. L. Winter die Soerakarta.]” (*Bintang Timor*, a.o. 24-11-1884). Although the text is labelled as a *pantun*, its length and narrative character are more typical of a *syair*. However, the poem’s rhyme scheme (a-a-b-b) is unusual for both genres. The opening verse, for instance, reads as follows: *Sabermoela maka terseboet lah, / Perkataken nama Hangtoewah, / Anak Hangmahmoet tempat doedoeknja, / Die soengi Doeijoeng dahoeloenja.*

seen as evidence of the dynamics of change at work in Malay language literature in Indonesia at this stage of its development: Genres still had to be developed and the borders between different text types (new and old) were not yet as fixed as in later decades.

Another source still popular in the new medium of the printed press was the Javanese textual tradition. If frequency is evidence of popularity, Panji tales especially seem to have been warmly welcomed by the readership: in 1905 alone, two Panji tales were published in *Bintang Soerabaia*. It is interesting to see that one of these was not translated into Malay but printed in (romanized) Javanese.¹⁹ Nevertheless, by the beginning of the twentieth century the presentation of a Javanese text is already an exception, since they were usually translated into Malay to make them accessible to all readers – as was, for instance, the second Panji tale in 1905.²⁰

Translations in general played an important role at this stage of Indonesian literary history and many texts which were published in newspapers were translated from foreign language works.²¹ Texts from Chinese like the serial “Tio Soen Haij atawa empat Soedara. Satoe tjerita jang betoel soeda kedjadian die negri Tjina” (Tio Soen Haij or the Four Brothers. A true story which happened in China), were borrowed from other newspapers like the Chinese-oriented *Ho Po* in Sukabumi or were specially prepared for publication in *Bintang Soerabaia*, for instance, the tale “Haij Swie, saorang ambtenaar jang setia di benoea Tjina” (Haij Swie, A loyal official in the land of China). Despite the fact that many – indeed probably most of the readers – had a Chinese background, works from the West were also quite popular. Their “Occidental” origin was not always obvious, especially since some of these texts had been transposed to an “Oriental” setting. A good example is the anonymously published “Hikajat dari astana Konstantinopel” (Tale from the palace of Constantinople) which was launched in September 1905 (*Bintang Soerabaia*, 9-9-1905; for the story itself: *Barang rahsia dari astana Konstantinopel 1892-99*). The text is, in fact, based on the German adventure novel *Der Türkenkaiser und seine Feinde oder die Geheimnisse des Hofes von Konstantinopel* by George F. Born (1837-1902).²² A second German author whose works made it into *Bintang Soerabaia* in 1905 is the German romantic Wilhelm Hauff (1802-1827). Several parts of his

¹⁹ “Tjerita Pandji. Terkarang oleh Pembantoe Bint. Soer. No. 62” (*Bintang Soerabaia*, a.o. 16-3-1905).

²⁰ “Hikajat Raden Pandji Woeloeng. Terkoetip oleh Siti Kaerah (Pembantoe Bintang Soerabaia No. 27)” (*Bintang Soerabaia*, a.o. 16-3-1905).

²¹ See Jedamski (2009) for the role of translations into Malay from European languages in colonial Indonesia generally. For the role of translations from the Chinese into Malay, see Salmon (1981: 43-45, 1987).

²² This work enjoyed some popularity in the Dutch East Indies. A Malay translation had already appeared as a serial in *Bintang Barat* in the 1880s and was later published as a booklet series (1892-1899). Cohen (2006: 419-420, note 143) says that the novel was also adapted for stage. A Javanese book from 1909-11, entitled *Topengmas: sêrat cariyos wawadosipun karaton ing Konstantinopël*, is also very probably based on Born’s novel since “Die Goldene Maske” (= The Golden Mask = Topeng emas) is the name of a principal character in the novel and also the title of the first chapter.

“Fairy-tale Almanacs” of 1826 and 1828 were published without naming the author, among them translations of the tales “Das Wirtshaus im Spessart” (The Spessart Inn, in *Bintang Soerabaia* entitled “Roemah penoempang pada pegoenoengan Spessart”), “Die Geschichte von dem Gespensterschiff” (The Tale of the Ghost Ship / Kapal Seitan) and “Der Kleine Muck” (The Story of Little Muck / Soewatoe hikajat doeloe kala moek jang ketjil), the last two were also set in the *Orient*. Hauff’s name was also not mentioned either, but at the beginning of each instalment it is stated that the works are translations: “Di salinken dari pada bahasa Ollanda kapada bahasa Melajoe, oleh toewan W. Huppe” (translated into Malay from the Dutch by Mr W. Huppe). It is not surprising that the translations of Hauff’s tales are not based on the German but on Dutch sources. In most cases, in fact, it was through the intermediation of the Dutch language that literature from Western countries was translated into Malay (Sykorsky 1980: 502). Therefore, a good knowledge of Dutch (and Malay) was one of the key skills for getting a job as an editor. Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that many serials were based on Dutch sources. To conclude this – admittedly rough and anything but complete – overview, one last example of this type should be mentioned: the serialized novel “Nonah Diana satoe tjerita jang betoel soeda kedjadian di Betawie” (Miss Diana, a true story which happened in Batavia), which appeared anonymously in *Bintang Soerabaia* in 1904 and 1905. Some years later, this novel was published in book form as the work of the popular Peranakan Chinese journalist and author Gouw Peng Liang (under the title “Tjerita nona Diana”).²³ However, as Tineke Hellwig has discovered, despite its setting in the Dutch East Indies, Gouw Peng Liang’s book about a young Indo-European woman who is unable to control her passions and therefore causes a homicide, is actually based on the Dutch language novel *Warm bloed* written by Elisabeth Overduyn-Heyligers and published in 1904. Since this is the same year the Malay adaption appeared in *Bintang Soerabaia* (and as a reprint of another newspaper, *Sinar Betawie*), this last example also demonstrates how fast the Malay newspapers worked to prepare suitable texts for their readers.

These few examples of texts which appeared in 1905 should be sufficient to provide an overall impression of the range of literary texts which can be found in a newspaper like *Bintang Soerabaia*. These works stretched from classical to more recent literary developments; texts which in more modern times have been assigned to such fixed categories as high or popular literature, encompassing influences from the East and the West and therefore forming an anything but homogeneous horizon of expectations for its readership.²⁴

²³ Although I did not have the possibility to compare Gouw Peng Liang’s book with the text in *Bintang Soerabaia*, I have every reason to assume that they are identical, since Gouw Peng Liang was the editor of *Sinar Betawie*, in which the text appeared for the first time. Hellwig gives 1920 as a possible year for the publication of Gouw Peng Liang’s book, but puts a question mark after this date since the book does not contain any publication details. Another serial by Gouw Peng Liang, written for *Bintang Betawi* and published in 1903 as book in the same year, is the story of *Lo Fen Koei* about a criminal opium farmer and womanizer (see: Worsley 2004).

²⁴ Not considered in this article are non-fictional texts about historical events or

LITERATURE FOR NEWSPAPERS

As mentioned, *Bintang Soerabaia* was rather fond of reprinting texts from other sources – whether from other newspapers, preferably from areas not too close to Surabaya like Batavia, or works which had already been published in book form. This practice was convenient for the newspaper as not only did these texts already exist, they were also guaranteed to suit the readers' taste. Despite this inclination, *Bintang Soerabaia* also produced and published original texts. Besides the importance of these self-produced serials for marketing reasons, it had at least two additional advantages: the first is related to copyright matters; the second to the greater capacity of such texts to take the specific needs of the readership into consideration.

During the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the question of authorship was still a fairly recent concept in the Malay world. In the context of traditional literature production, the majority of texts were passed down orally or in the form of manuscripts, and the names of authors were thought to be of little import and therefore unknown. However, keeping pace with the rising importance of the printing press marking the beginning of the 'age of mechanical reproduction' in textual production, questions about copyright became more important. Although texts could still be reprinted from other printed sources, at the beginning of the twentieth century this source was supposed to be mentioned. Likewise, it also became common practice to add copyright claims to self-produced texts, such as: "Ini hikajat di perlindoengi di bawah atoeran hak pengarang (*Staatsblad*) 1881 no. 199" (This tale is protected by the copyright regulations published in the *Staatsblad* no. 199 from 1881).

An additional advantage of self-produced texts is that they could be tailored to the needs and expectations of the readership to a greater extent – custom-made literature in a manner of speaking. Quite often journalists and editors were themselves the producers of these serialized prose texts or *syairs* (Ahmat Adam 1991: 45; Watson 1971: 419). Therefore it should come as no surprise that many of the most prominent authors of the pioneering era of printed Malay language literature in colonial Indonesia were actually journalists (A. Wahab Ali 1991: 57-58), among them H. Kommer, F.D.J. Pangemanann and Gouw Peng Liang whom have been mentioned above.

The time has come to introduce an as yet unknown author who was active as a journalist, translator and writer of original stories for *Bintang Soerabaia* during the first decade of the twentieth century. His real name and identity remain uncertain, since he only used to sign with his pen name, Bintang Jupiter (Planet Jupiter). Besides this pseudonym, his function is given as "Djohan Antalas", a job specification which can be translated as 'Satin Hero' and raises even more questions than it gives answers. All that can be said is that he had

prominent persons which also appeared in a serialized publishing mode from time to time. In 1905, for instance, a history of the Franco-German War of 1870/71 ("Tjerita perang antara Frankrijk dan Duitschland di tahoen 1870 sampe 1871") was published in *Bintang Soerabaia* (a.o. 1-2-1905).

a sound knowledge of Javanese, since some translations of Javanese texts appeared under his name. It can be assumed that the text which appeared in *Bintang Soerabaia* from 24 July 1902 to 6 March 1903 under the title “Hikajat Njai Salamah” is written by this author.²⁵ As mentioned above, it is usually hard to determine whether a text is an original work, a close or rather freely adapted translation or a reprint from a book or from another source. Nevertheless, some novels can be definitely classified as texts written for immediate publication in newspapers. This deduction is based on extra textual clues. One example is the text under discussion as will be shown below. The story was divided into twenty-five instalments, encompassing eleven chapters and covering between two to four columns on the title page – which made it the most prominent (in terms of quantity) and important (in terms of positioning) part of the issues released at this time (Illustration 3). Remarkable in publishing terms is an interval of more than four months between Instalments Seventeen and Eighteen, lasting from 21 September 1902 to 21 January 1903. Of course, some issues carrying the serial referred this hiatus in the following notice which was published in *Bintang Soerabaia* a few days before the story was continued, obviously in response to readers’ enquiries:

Toewan toewan pembatja Bint. Soerab. / Membri tahoe dalem minggoe ini hikajat Njai Salamah hendak di teroesken lagi, sebab kita poenja pakerdja'an soeda rampoeng samoewa hingga ada tempoe boewat mengarang hikajat itoe. Harep toewan toewan jang soeda banjak menanjak hikajat itoe mendjadi tahoe. / Salam kita / BINTANG JUPITER / Pengarang “Njai Salmamah” [sic] (Bintang Soerabaia, 28-12-1903).

To the readers of Bint[ang] Soerab[ai]a / We announce that the “Hikayat Njai Salamah” will be continued again this week, as our work has now all been completed and hence we now have time to write the story. We hope that all readers, many of whom have already asked about the story, will now be informed. / Best Wishes / Bintang Jupiter / Author of “Njai Salamah”.

This notice is more than just another indication of the importance of these fictional texts to its readers, it provides insight into the working process of and conditions for authors at that period of time. Creating texts of literary fiction was only possible if there was time left after other duties had been completed. And, last but not least, this simply shows that Bintang Jupiter did not have enough time to proceed with writing his work of fiction from September to January.

Below, I shall provide a short summary of the contents of this tale before discussing some of the most crucial features which show the influence of the mode of publication on the way the story is told and also how it influenced its contents to a certain degree.

²⁵ The full title is “Hikajat Njai Salamah; Satoe tjerita jang soenggoe soeda kedjadian die Djawa Timoer pada tempo doeloe kala” (The tale of Nyai Salamah – A story which really happened in East Java in former times).



Illustration 3. Title page of *Bintang Soerabain* from 15 August 1902 featuring Instalment no. 11 of the serial “Hikajat Njai Salamah” and an advertisement for imported cigars (available in the shops of Oei Moo Liem and Ong Ing Bie in Surabaya).

THE “HIKAJAT NJAI SALAMAH” AS AN EXAMPLE OF NEWSPAPER LITERATURE

Bintang Jupiter’s narration is mainly set in East Java. Other locations are Singapore, and ends not far away from there, in Southampton in England. The narration encompasses a time span of about thirteen to fourteen years. It begins in Pasuruan and ends not far away from there, in Surabaya. It is not stated when exactly the story takes place, but there is some textual evidence

to indicate that its setting must be sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century. The contents of the hikayat are as follows:

Entjik Brahim, a Malay goldsmith (*toekang mas*) originally from the island of Lingga, has been living in Java where he has been running a successful jewellery shop in Pasuruan for three years. He has a fourteen-year-old daughter called Salamah and a twenty-one-year old son, Djoepri. His first wife had passed away from cholera some years ago and he has since remarried a Javanese woman named Aripa. On the occasion of a feast, Brahim informs his best friend, a Chinese man named Lie Boen Kiat, that Salamah will marry soon. Having heard this, Lie Boen Kiat looks for a way to prevent the marriage by any means possible because he has Salamah in his sights. He informs Brahim's second wife, the envious Aripa, about his plans and kidnaps Salamah one night while her father is away on a business trip. Disappointed by the police investigations, Brahim decides to look for his daughter himself. After some time, his efforts to find Salamah are indeed successful and he discovers her and her kidnapper in the deep forest of Lumajang. However, while Brahim fights Lie Boen Kiat and finally kills him with his *golok*, Salamah is kidnapped again, this time by Si Goener, an infamous and ruthless bandit from Madura. The robbers decide to sell Salamah to a Chinese carpenter from Probolinggo. He then sells the girl on, this time as a servant to an English widow in Singapore, Mrs Nelson. It turns out after some time that this kind-hearted English woman happens to know Salamah's father quite well, because he had helped her some time before when she was living on the island of Lingga. Henceforth, Salamah is no longer treated as a servant but as a member of the family and Mrs Nelson immediately writes a letter to Entjik Brahim but never receives an answer. In fact, Brahim and Djoepri, who had become aware of Aripa's complicity, have decided to go back to their homeland. While crossing from Java to Lingga, their ship is caught in a storm and collides with another ship. Brahim drowns in the sea but Djoepri survives and reaches the coast of Lingga. Coincidentally, the other ship involved in this accident is carrying Salamah's fiancé, Mahadat Salim, from Sebangka. He is on his way to Java with his sister Siti Mahadijat after receiving a letter about Salamah's kidnapping. In their case, it is Mahadat Salim who dies at sea and his sister who survives.

Salamah decides to remain in Singapore, where she becomes the *nyai* of a relative of Mrs Nelson, the well-mannered and cultivated Mr Robertzon, who has just recently arrived in Singapore from England to work. Since he does not earn enough money to marry a European wife, he is looking for a native – and Salamah appeals to him. She returns his affection and three years later gives birth to his child, a boy named Henri. After some years, they move to Surabaya when Mr Robertzon has been able to procure a better-paid position.

The story focuses then, in parallel running plotlines, on the fates of Djoepri and Mahadijat. In contrast to Djoepri, who drifts north, Mahadijat comes ashore on the Javanese coast (in the vicinity of the city of Tuban) and is helped by a Javanese *kyai* named Djodrono. He takes her into his home where she can recover, and later helps her when a wealthy young Javanese *priyayi* and son of a regent in East Java lays claim to her. Djodrono supports her flight (which is the only way to evade the *priyayi's* demands) and organizes a *prahu* which will take her to Surabaya. On board the ship, she is assaulted once again, this time by the seamen. She is able to kill two of them with a *golok*, frightening the other sailors into flight. After these fairly traumatic experiences, Mahadijat decides

that it is not good for a woman to travel alone. Henceforth, she decides to change her identity, that is, her gender by wearing men's clothes and renaming herself Abang Djonet. Assuming this new identity, she arrives in Surabaya where she meets Djoepri, who has been living in Lingga for several years and has only recently decided to go back to Java. Although they do not recognize each other, they become friends. Both are looking for a job when they hear that a man from England, who is living together with a *nyai*, – none other than Mr Robertzon and Salamah - is looking for servants. Although Djoepri is not willing to work in a house with a *nyai*, Siti Mahadijat (still in disguise as Abang Djonet) takes the job. It takes some time before Salamah and Mahadijat/Abang Djonet recognize each other, and some more time until Salamah and her elder brother are reunited. In the end Djoepri falls in love with Mahadijat (when he sees her for the first time in women's clothing) and they decide to marry (and will later have five children and live happily together until they die, as the narrator reports). Salamah and Mr Robertzon also decide to tie the knot. During the wedding breakfast, Henri is playing with some other Indonesian children. By accident, while attempting to shoot a bird with his rifle (a gift from his father) he shoots a woman hiding in a tree. As it turns out, the wounded woman is none other than Aripa, Salamah's and Djoepri's evil stepmother. Finally, she asks forgiveness for her evil deeds and thinks that it was God's will that she has been shot. Salamah takes care of her until she dies not long after.

So far the contents of the tale. In its title, it is simply labelled a *hikayat*. Furthermore, it also carries the term *cerita* in its subtitle. This double-use of genre terms was not uncommon at that time given that, as mentioned above, the use of genre names was still quite inconsistent. In fact, as hopefully has become clear, this prose text cannot be assigned to one specific genre but is an example of a commingling of several genres. Basically, the author has combined two of the most popular genres of its time: the crime story and the *nyai* tale.²⁶ The popularity of these two text sorts is also reflected in the literature programme of *Bintang Soerabaia* in which examples of both can be found quite regularly.²⁷

Apart from this general observation on the text which simply proves it to be a literary product of its time, some additional, more peculiar features reveal its traits as a piece of newspaper literature. Actually this interdependency

²⁶ See Jedamski (1995) for the importance of crime fiction in colonial Indonesia. An anthology of *nyai* tales including an introduction by Henk Maier is given in Sutedja-Liem (2007).

²⁷ In 1901, for instance, two *nyai* tales ran parallel in this newspaper. "Njai Roeminah" by an author named Roekimi about a young and beautiful Javanese *nayub* dancer is set in Batavia in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The other, "Njai Isah", is a reprint of F. Wigger's novel previously published in the newspaper *Pembrita Betawi*. In 1900 the serial about the bandit chief "Si Tjonat" mentioned earlier was soon followed by another serial, which likewise deals with a robber band in the forests around Batavia: "Saimah dan Mas Poera Adisastra alias si Lamat, kepala penjamoen di bilangan Betawie Kolon" (Saimah and Mas Poera Adisastra, alias si Lamat, a bandit chief in the area of Western Betawi). Interestingly, the second part of this long serial mentions two names as authors: according to the heading, the story was written (*terkarang oleh*) by F.D.J. Pangemanann, with help (*di bantoe oleh*) of H.F.R. Kommer (probably identical to H. Kommer, see Sutedja-Liem 2007: 47-48).

commences with the placement of the serial, since the “Hikajat Njai Salamah” was printed in the space in which regular news reports would usually have been expected (and sometimes even appeared), that is right on the front page of the newspaper directly under its masthead. Cogently, information and entertainment share the same place and there are also content-related connections between the fields of literary fiction and factual news. Both – the news and the serials – provided the readers with new (not in the sense of current, but previously unreleased) information about something which had happened.²⁸ As stated in its subtitle, the text under discussion also purports to be based on a true incident: “Satoe Tjerita jang soenggoe soeda kedjadian di Djawa Timoer pada tempo doeloe kala” (A story which really happened in East Java in earlier times). This formula is not exceptional since many Malay language texts published in newspaper or book form in this period use similar expressions (Hellwig 2012: 14-15). Even though there are some examples of texts which actually do have a real background,²⁹ in most cases this formula should be seen as a literary topos and it can be assumed that most readers were aware of this (A. Wahab Ali 1991: 127). The tendency to link the fictional text to reality is strengthened by presenting a world with which the readers were familiar. Pertinently, it was texts especially written for newspapers which offered the authors good opportunities to integrate such elements into their writing as they were in the perfect position to have good knowledge about the horizons of their readership, which was essentially built up on how the world was represented in the newspaper itself.

To illustrate this aspect, one longer passage from the opening chapter of the “Hikajat Njai Salamah” is quoted here. In this opening chapter, daily life in Pasuruan is described as it was in earlier times when there was, for instance, still no rail link with Surabaya. The author describes a restaurant in a Chinese hotel located in the vicinity of Entjik Brahim’s house in these words:

Antara soedagar soedagar itoe boekan sadja orang djawa, tetapi orang tjina djoega terlaloe banjak. Ma’aloemlah, pada tempo djaman itoe orang tjina tida terlaloe teriket seperti sekarang ini, maskipoen ada pas djalan djoega, tetapi terlaloe gampanglah tjina tjina itoe kaloe mahoe kepigian ka mana mana, apa lagi kaloe berdagang, bolih di bilang dengan sasoekanja. Betoel di djaman itoe beloem begitoe banjak toko, djanganken di Pasoeroeanpoen, di Soerabaia toko Oei Moo Liem di sini misih beloem ada, krana pendodoek die Soerabaia beloem begitoe rame, dan di lain lain negri beloem sekali soeka membeli barang barang berharga seperti orang di djaman ini. (Bintang Soerabaia, 24-7-1902)

Among the merchants were not only Javanese, but also many Chinese. It should be noted that at this time the Chinese were not as restricted as they are nowadays. Although passports had already been introduced, it was much easier for the Chinese to travel somewhere, especially on business. This can be said

²⁸ For the relationship between news and fiction in European feuilletons of the 19th century, see Bachleitner (2012). For the relevance of novelty to the development of the novel in eighteenth century England, see Davis (1997).

²⁹ The story on “Nona Diana” mentioned above, for instance, was (partly) based on real incidents as Tineke Hellwig (2012: 49) has detected.

wholeheartedly. Certainly at this time there are not yet so many shops, especially not in Pasuruan. In Surabaya, the shop of Oei Moo Liem did not yet exist, because the inhabitants of Surabaya were not yet very numerous, and luxury goods from other countries were not bought in such quantities as people buy them nowadays.

Two points from this quote are of particular interest: The first is the mention of Oei Moo Liem, a Chinese store in Surabaya which offered food and beverages, even imports from Europe (Claver 2014: 210). The readers were not only acquainted with Oei Moo Liem because it was one of the oldest shops in existence in their hometown, founded as early as 1849, but also because it was one of the most important and frequent advertisers in *Bintang Soerabaia*. Besides placing announcements in the regular advertisement section, the name of the concern sometimes even appeared directly under the masthead (Illustration 3). The mention of this name in the serial might be considered an early example of “product placement”, but there is a far greater chance that the author is simply using its well-known name as reference to illustrate to his readers the differences between then and now. The same can be said about the second reference in the passage: the restrictions of movement to which Chinese people were subject, organized within the framework of the so-called *passen- en wijkenstelsel* (pass and zoning system). These regulations, part of the colonial policy of racial separation in the Dutch East Indies, limited the options Chinese people had about both where they lived and general mobility, since they were forced to apply for permission when they wanted to travel to another district. Especially after they had been enforced once again in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Claver 2014: 133), the regulations had become a matter of public controversy and of grievance to the Chinese. Chinese people formed the second largest population group in Surabaya and many – probably most – readers of *Bintang Soerabaia* were of Chinese descent, hence, directly affected by the act of discrimination described in the *hikayat*. It is remarkable that such a serious question is discussed in an ostensibly entertaining story, as it is, in fact, a direct criticism of contemporary colonial policy.³⁰

Whereas these two examples of the integration of elements from the readers’ environment form a content-related dependency, there are other peculiarities in newspaper serials which touch more on the discourse level of this *hikayat*, and therefore on the way the story is told.

Turning to the style of narration of the story, it has to be said that the “Hikajat Njai Salamah” is extraordinarily *eventful*. According to narratological concepts, an “event” takes place when a change of a status which has a crucial influence on how the story proceeds occurs (Schmid 2003: 19). This status of change can be caused either by the protagonists (in which case it is called an “action”), or passively by external factors (in which case it is called a “happening”) (Chatman 1978: 32). In other words: the more events a text

³⁰ One feature Neuschäfer (1989: 131) ascribes to the newspaper novel is its seismic sense (‘seismographisches Gespür’) of the mental attitudes of people in periods of change. These sorts of qualities in particular make this kind of literature worth researching – beyond its role in literary history.

contains in proportion to its length, the more narrative it is. Consequently, the “Hikajat Njai Salamah” can be described as an extraordinarily narrative text, since almost every instalment features new actions by the protagonists, happenings, incidents and, to a large degree, coincidences (in most cases ascribed to the will of Allah). All these help to propel the story and to bring it finally to a (happy) ending. In contrast, predominantly descriptive text passages are rather scarce; apart from the introduction which depicts earlier life in Pasuruan, only few longer passages can be found.

Actually, this intense narration style also favours (to a certain degree) the above-mentioned combination of different genres, since every episode works as a story in its own right. Hence, the fragmented (or episodically) mode of publication is expressed in a fragmented mode of story-telling – a feature found in serialized newspaper literature in general, and also in other cultural contexts and textual traditions.³¹

Finally, the mode of publication not only influences the overall structure of the text, it also affects the language level. To illustrate this, some quotes from the *hikayat* are presented and discussed in the concluding part of this article.

Temtoe pematja beloem loepa jang koetika Mahadat Salim aken soesoel toenangannja ka tanah Djawa dengan membawak soedaranja Mahadiat [sic]³² namanja aken tetapi dengan takdiroallah, Mahadat Salim itoepoen mati di dalem oeleken aer pada masa dateng pentjaroba menempoeh prahoenja Mahadat Salim dan Entjik Brahim. (Bintang Soerabaia, 20-9-1902)

For sure, you (the reader) will not have forgotten that Mahadat Salim had followed his fiancée to Java, taking his sister Mahadiat along with him, but by God’s will, Mahadat Salim died in a whirlpool after the collision between the prahus of Mahadat Salim and Entjik Brahim.

Such sentences, reminding the reader of facts already known, occur fairly frequently. This stylistic feature of the text seems a bit odd when one considers that the whole serial consisting of only twenty-five instalments is not really terribly long and could have been read in a few hours. However, of course the actual reading time was longer since one could read only one instalment per day, and sometimes the intervals between two episodes were longer. Breaks of one to two days were standard. Longer breaks – such as those in this text – were, admittedly, fairly exceptional. Furthermore, the author always had to take into consideration that some of his readers might have missed some parts of the story; for example, because their subscription did not commence until after the serial had begun. For these reasons, from time to time it was essential to recall some already known facts. Sometimes the author let the protagonist themselves retell parts of the story. For instance, when Salamah

³¹ See, for instance, Adamowicz-Hariasz’s (1999: 165) remarks on the French *roman-feuilleton*.

³² The spelling of names is rather inconsistent in this serial. *Mahadijat* is sometimes spelled *Mahadiat* (as in this quote), and *Robertzon* sometimes becomes *Robertson*.

is being asked the reason of her deep unhappiness by Mrs Nelson, it should have sufficed for the narrator to write a sentence like “and then Salamah told her what had happened” or something in a similar vein. Instead, the narrator uses the form of direct speech and Salamah can inform her new mistress about her fate – and the reader about what had happened in earlier published instalments of the serial:

Njonja saia ini anaknja toeang mas di Pasaroeang di tanah Djawa, bapa saia orang Melajoe Entjik Brahim namanja, dengen ada soedara satoe laki laki Djoepri namanja, itoe kakak saia. Dengen tida tahoe bagimana halnja saia di bawak lari waktoe malem oleh satoe Tjina moeda Lie Boen Kiat namanja, katanja itoe Tjina ada sobat kerasnja bapak saia. Saia di bawa ka hoetan Loemadjang kira kira anem boelan berdijem di hoetan seperti binatang, kamoedian saia mendengar soewaranja bapak di hoetan itoe, jang roepanja soesoel pada saia, tetapi ach njonja, kapiran betoel saia soeda di bawak lari lain penjamoen bangsa Madoera, jang mana mendjoewal saia kapada toekang meubel di Probolinggo, jalah A Sing Moek jang djoega bawak saia kemari sampe mendjadi boedaknja njonja. (Bintang Soerabaia, 18-8-1902)

I am the daughter of a goldsmith in Pasuruan in Java. My father is Malay and his name is Entjik Brahim. I also have a sibling named Djoepri; he is my older brother. For reasons I cannot explain, I was kidnapped one night by a young Chinese man named Lie Boen Kiat. This Chinese man was allegedly a close friend of my father. I was taken into the forest of Lumajang in which I remained for about six months living like an animal. Then in the forest I heard the voice of my father who apparently was looking for me, but oh Madam! It was to no avail as I was kidnapped again by a Madurese bandit who sold me to a carpenter in Probolinggo; this was A Sing Moek who brought me here to become your servant.

Having been informed by these pieces of information in Instalment Twelve, a new reader would have been able to follow the remaining episodes of the serial without any difficulty.

Whereas the last two quotes from “Hikajat Njai Salamah” can be described as past-oriented, there are also passages whose character can be defined as fairly future-oriented, indicating that something is about to happen without disclosing too much. The ends of many instalments are written in this way.

The sequence containing Salamah’s abduction, for instance, ends abruptly when Lie Boen Kiat, armed with a revolver, carries the shocked girl out of her room on his back. Likewise, the episode which recounts how Entjik Brahim later detects Lie Boen Kiat stops just after he had heard the voice of his former friend in the darkness of the forest. In both cases the story is interrupted at the climax, leaving the reader to be satisfied with the obligatory closing formula “Misih ada samboengannja” (To be continued). Apart from such open-ended instalments featuring downright cliff-hangers, from time to time the narrator foreshadows the further development of the tale with his words. This is illustrated by the following example:

Rasa hatinja Lie Boen Kiat tempo itoe senengnja seperti orang menang loterij dapet seratoes riboe roepiah, sebab dia temtoein jang maksoednja itoe bakal kedjadian. / Girangnja Aripa

djoega tida terbilang lagi, krana klilipnja temtoe bakal ilang. Tetapi dia tiada inget bahoewa Toeah Allah tiada kesamaran sekarang jang di lakoeken manoesia, dan menggantoengi hoekoem dan siksa kapada sekalian orang jang djahat, kendati perboewatannja di bikin resia bagimana sadja (Bintang Soerabaia, 21-9-1902.)

At this time the feelings of Lie Boen Kiat were like those of a person who had won a hundred thousand rupiahs at the lottery, because now he was sure that his plan would work. Arip's joy at the thought that the nuisance would certainly vanish, was so extraordinary it baffled description. However, she forgot that nothing can be concealed from God, and that He will judge and torment all evil people, even though they had perpetrated their deeds secretly.

This sentence, which appears as early as the third instalment, foreshadows not only the end of the story (including the pretty awful fate allotted to Aripa), it also underlines another quality of the serial: its moralistic claim.³³ The message is easily comprehensible: The good will be favoured, whereas the evil will eventually be punished for their deeds. As a consequence, the figures presented in the "Hikajat Salamah" are fairly paradigmatic, showing examples of proper and improper behaviour (including the consequences). This message is repeated at the end of the story when the narrator closes his *hikayat* with an admonition to all step-mothers and step-children, but not before reminding the reader that it is worth continuing to read (and subscribe to) *Bintang Soerabaia* since a new *hikayat* is already in the pipeline. The following quote also serves as a good conclusion to this article since it again stresses the relevance of serialized fiction in newspapers to both the readers and the editors:

Demikianlah tamatnja hikajat ini. Lain boelan kita hendak karang hikajat lagi, kaloe soeda habis mengarang "Hikajat", dalem s. k. Bint. Sem- [sic] Moega moega karangan ini mendjadi toeladan bagi segala maktiri, dan anak tiri jang kebanyakan tiada membawak dami dalem hidoepnja. Dan ingetlah bahoewa sabar itoe soewatoe kelakoewan jang termolia adanja. / Tabik kita / Bintang Joepiter [sic] no. LVII / Djohan Antalas B. Soer. (Bintang Soerabaia, 6-3-1903)

And so ends this *hikayat*. In another month we shall once again compose a *hikayat*, and, when the composition of the *hikayat* is finished, it will be (published) in *Bintang Soerabaia*. May this work serve as an example to all step-mothers and step-children, the majority of whom are not blessed with a harmonious life. And always remember that patience is one of the most highly esteemed virtues. Best Regards / Bintang Joepiter no. LVII / Satin Hero of B[intang] Soer[abaia].

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³³ The dishonest character of Lie Boen Kiat is already suggested by his *telling name* which sounds like *lebun kiat*, what could be translated as 'devious deception'.

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