A semiotic analysis of the novel "Cantik itu Luka" by Eka Kurniawan

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Abstract

Literary work is the arrangement of concepts that are imagined into writing that has aesthetic and moral values. In addition, literary works must be able to produce beautiful works of art. Many elements are involved in the creative process of literary works, including science, insights, thoughts, beliefs, and real experiences, as well as elements of the author's imagination. Besides having structural elements, novels also have semiotic elements, which study the structures, rules, and conventions that make signs have meaning and significance. This research aims to identify the semiotic elements in Eka Kurniawan's novel "Cantik Itu Luka". In this study, researchers used semiotic theory according to the views of Charles Pierce. After researching, the novel "Cantik itu Luka" by Eka Kurniawan shows a lot of semiotic word usage , such as icon (topeng wayang, pabrik, kucing hitam), index (jejak kaki di hutan, hujan ders, merokok), and symbol (bunga, api, rokok). Researchers use a qualitative descriptive method, or a descriptive method accompanied by analysis activities, to obtain data. The data was obtained by reading Eka Kurniawan's book "Beautiful Is Hurt" and analyzing it semiotically, finding many explicit signs. Utilizing this analysis, readers should be educated to appreciate literary works and understand the semiotic system in them.

Keywords: *novel, qualitative descriptive*, *semiotic analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is the expression of artistic and imaginative facts as a form of manifestation of human life and society Mursal Ensten 1978 in iqbal 2022 (Iqbal, 2022)Literature conveys its ideas through language and has a positive impact on human life. The most interesting books to read are literary works from time to time. This is due to the fact that literary books are more diverse, creative and colorful. Literary works have always appealed to its lovers because of how it has evolved over time. As it turns out, even though it is just a literary work, it has contributed significantly in changing a country's culture or way of thinking. the existence of literature has various types, depending on what point of view we use to assess the literary work.

In general, a novel is a long prose work that tells the story of a person's life and the people around him or her, with special emphasis on the characters and characteristics of each actor. However, (Siahaan et al., 2021) considers the novel as a type of literature that takes the form of a continuous narrative characterized by actions and reactions between characters, especially between antagonists and protagonists. the novel as a component of literature (Damayanti et al., 2022). Poetry, prose, and drama are the three main categories of literature.

Novels, as well as short stories, fall under the category of prose. They are called prose because of their form of narrative fiction or narrative text. Novels have elements of beauty that can make readers feel good, happy, moved, attract attention, and refresh (Dames, 2007; Schindler et al., 2017; Smith, 2005). The author does not write his ideas directly so that it is easy to understand. The author needs some kind of tool to convey the hidden message. By using signs, authors only need to present signs so that readers can discover the author's intentions. This does not require them to write explicitly what they want to convey to the reader. Examining a work of literature, a theory is needed. The way to study a work of literature, especially novel is very diverse, one of which is by using semiotic studies.

The novel *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan is a critically acclaimed Indonesian novel that combines elements of magic realism, folklore, history, and social commentary. First published in 2002, the novel tells the story of Dewi Ayu, a beautiful woman of Dutch-Indonesian descent, who rises from her grave 21 years after her death. Her life story, along with the stories of her descendants, serves as a narrative lens through which the history of Indonesia's colonial past, its fight for independence, and its post-colonial struggles are explored.

The novel is known for its mix of surrealism and historical reality, using a style often compared to the works of Gabriel García Márquez. The plot revolves around Dewi Ayu, who, during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, is forced into prostitution and becomes a central figure whose beauty is both a blessing and a curse. She bears four daughters, and much of the novel deals with the complexities of their lives, particularly how beauty, fate, and suffering are intertwined in the broader context of Indonesia's turbulent political and social history.

Eka Kurniawan uses a blend of grotesque humor, myth, and realism to explore heavy themes such as colonialism, violence, patriarchy, and social inequality. The novel examines how beauty and power interact with societal norms, and how the characters' fates are shaped by historical forces beyond their control. The vivid, layered narrative and bold character portrayals make *Cantik itu Luka* a rich text for semiotic analysis, especially in its treatment of symbols related to beauty, oppression, and resistance.

The study of semiotics is concerned with understanding how signs are created, used and understood by people, and how they can be used to understand human culture, identity and understanding of the world (Syamsurrijal, Hadi, et al., 2023). Semiotics is a discipline that helps us to understand how signs and meanings are created, understood, and used in communication. As a discipline, semiotics is used in various fields such as linguistics, literature, art, media, anthropology, and communication to analyse and understand the process of human communication in its various forms. Semiotics can also help us to explore the meanings hidden in the signs we encounter in our daily lives(Syamsurrijal, Abdussamad, et al., 2023) to explain the semiotic meaning researcher used the theory of Charles sander pierce. According to pierce in

(Sari Rahayu, 2021) Peirce's theory expands his triangle of meaning into a full model of three logical paths. Based on the appearance of the sign, it is divided into qualisign, sinsign, and legisign. Based on its reference (object) is divided into icon, index and symbol. While in the interpretation, divided into rheme, dicent, and argument (Kikuchi, 2013; Queiroz, 2012; Veivo, 2009). These three types of signs are always present together and cannot be separated in literary works. The whole is related to a series of semiosis. This research will be more dominant in search for the meaning of icons, indices, and symbols.

In this research, researcher used some literature review such as, Study Of Meaning In Al Mahsar's Song Lyrics "*Pangeran Inaq*": Semiotic (Syamsurrijal, Hadi, et al., 2023), second literature is "konsep cinta pada puisi-puisi karya sapardi djoko damono: analisis semiotika carles sanders pierce by (Mustika & Isnaini, 2021). The third, "Analisis semiotika pada film laskar pelangi, by(Sya'dian, 2015) . The fourth is "analisis kajian semiotika dalam puisi chairil anwar menggunakan teori Charles sanders peirce(Sari Rahayu, 2021) . the last literature review "Kajian semiotika Charles sanders pierce: relasi trikotomi (ikon, indeks, dan symbol) dalam cerpen anak mercusuar karya mashdar zainal. (Siregar & Wulandari, 2020).

The gap between the current study and the literature reviews lies primarily in the subject and medium of analysis, as well as the specific text being examined. While previous studies focus on analyzing semiotics in different forms of media such as song lyrics in Al Mahsar's "Pangeran Inaq," poetry by Sapardi Djoko Damono and Chairil Anwar, the film "Laskar Pelangi," and the children's short story "Anak Mercusuar" by Mashdar Zainal, this current study centers on the novel "Cantik itu Luka" by Eka Kurniawan. Novels, especially one as intricate as "Cantik itu Luka," are much longer and more complex narrative forms compared to the works analyzed in the other studies. This introduces a different level of depth in terms of narrative structure, characterization, and symbolism. Furthermore, while each study uses semiotics to analyze unique texts, your focus on "Cantik itu Luka" offers a rich field for analysis due to its storytelling, social commentary, and multi-layered symbolism. The novel's blend of folklore, magic realism, and historical themes creates a unique case for semiotic study, distinct from the other media explored. Although all the studies apply Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic model (icon, index, symbol), novels may require a more extensive interpretation due to their complex character development and plot intricacies. Additionally, while the prior studies analyze works from different cultural or historical contexts, your research addresses contemporary Indonesian literature, adding to semiotic studies within this specific literary field. The gap, therefore, lies in the novel medium itself, the complexity of the text, and the cultural or thematic relevance unique to Eka Kurniawan's work, setting it apart from the other forms of media previously analyzed.

The objective of this study is to explore and interpret the underlying meanings, symbols, and signs present within the novel using semiotic theory, particularly Charles Sanders Peirce's

model of icon, index, and symbol. The study aims to uncover how Kurniawan uses these semiotic elements to convey deeper messages related to Indonesian society, history, culture, and human experiences. By analyzing the text through a semiotic lens, the study seeks to provide insight into how Kurniawan's narrative techniques, symbolism, and themes contribute to the novel's rich and layered storytelling, thus offering a deeper understanding of the novel's social, historical, and philosophical dimensions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive research, according to Kriyantono in (Wibisono & Sari, 2021) uses qualitative data to show or describe something in a clear way. The results of this study will be in the form of descriptive data consisting of written or spoken words from individuals and observable behavior. Then it will be described as a whole to show the results of the writing. Semiotic analysis is the study of signs, especially from the perspective of Charles Sanders Pierce, who developed three graded systems of signification: icon, index, and symbol. Semiotic analysis is used to identify and understand the symbols and signs depicted in the novel "cantik itu luka".

The source of data in this research is the novel "Cantik itu Luka" by Eka Kurniawan, which obtained from the website. In collecting data researcher used some technique such as, reading, note taking, concluding". Reading means here is the researcher reading whole the novel, while reading researcher note taking the word that show the icon, index and symbol in the novel. And the last is concluding which is part of icon, index, and symbol. The data analysis technique is done by analyzing or examining the semiotics of the novel "cantik itu luka"

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The semiotic elements in the novel "Cantik Itu Luka" by Eka Kurniawan.

A. Icon

Icon signs contained in the novel "Cantik Itu Luka" such as (1) **Topeng Wayang** This icon represents the relationship between tradition and modernity in Indonesian society. Topeng wayang is used as a symbol of social change and traditional values that continue to transform. (2) **Pabrik Perawatan Kulit**, the factory became an icon of modernization and industrialization that affected the lives of people, especially women. It also illustrates the dark side of economic development, including the exploitation and oppression experienced by workers. (3) **Rumah Bordil di Halimunda,** This brothel became an icon of the tragic story of Dewi Ayu and her descendants. It represents social injustice, class distinction, and the struggle for survival amidst dramatic social and political change**. (4) Kucing Hitam,** The black cat in this novel often appears as an icon of bad luck or a sign of bad things to come. The cat often appears in critical or tragic situations. (5) **Kota Jakarta**,

Jakarta, as a large and modern capital city, becomes an icon of rapid social, political and economic change in the novel. The city also represents the complexities and contradictions of urban life.

B. Index

indexes in the novel "Cantik Itu Luka" by Eka Kurniawan refer to signs that show cause-and-effect relationships or interrelationships between elements in the story. The following are some examples of indexes found by researchers in the novel and their analysis: (1) **Jejak Kaki di hutan**, it can be an index of a person's presence or journey in physical space. For example, the footprints of a grandmother or her children lost in the forest indicate their movement and trigger the development of a plot. (2) **Hujan deras,** it can be an index of weather changes or mood changes. In a deeper context, hujan deras can also be an index of emotional changes or internal conflicts of the characters in the novel.(3) **Merokok**, The smoking activity in the novel can be an index of a character's anxiety or tension. For example, a character who smokes constantly might indicate that they are in a difficult situation or considering something seriously. (4) **Gempa Bumi**, Earthquakes are an index of the uncontrollable forces of nature and can be a trigger for disaster or tragedy in the story. It can also be an index of instability or destruction in the lives of the characters. (5) **Kelaparan**, The hunger experienced by the people during hard times is an index of poverty and social injustice. It reflects the social conditions that affect the daily lives of the characters in the novel. (6) **Banjir**, Floods are an index of extreme monsoons or lack of adequate infrastructure in this novel. Floods can also be an index of the government's failure to deal with environmental and security issues. (7) **Penculikan** , The act of kidnapping can be an index of social tension or conflict in a society. They also reflect rampant crime or a loss of control over public security.

C. Symbol

The symbols contained in the novel "cantik itu luka" are used intensively to convey deep meaning, theme, and characterization. Such as (1) **Merah**: The color red often appears as a symbol of power, passion, or danger. For example, the presence of Dewi Ayu's red hair can symbolize her strong physical attractiveness or ambition in achieving her goals. (2)**Air ,** Water can be a symbol of life, cleanliness, or cleansing from sin. For example, water motifs that often appear in stories, such as rivers or rainwater, reflect the transformation or change experienced by characters.(3)**Bunga**, Flowers are often used as symbols of beauty, life, or destruction. For example, flowers growing around a skincare factory can symbolize life blooming in the midst of suffering and misery.(4)**Api** Fire is often used as a symbol of power, transformation, or destruction. For example, a fire burning down a skincare factory can symbolize rage or raging social discontent.

(5)**Rokok**, Cigarettes can symbolize addiction, anxiety, or limited freedom. For example, a character who smokes frequently may reflect pressure or a desire to escape a difficult reality. (6) **Bumi dan Gunung** , Earth and mountains can symbolize the balance of nature and spirituality. For example, the mountains of Pangrango Valley serve as a powerful backdrop for the characters' journey, reflecting the challenges and power of nature.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study of the novel Cantik itu luka by eka kurniawan, a conclusion can be obtained as follows. A semiotic analysis of the novel "Cantik Itu Luka" by Eka Kurniawan reveals the careful and complex use of the three main elements in Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory: icons, indexes, and symbols.

(1) Icon , Eka Kurniawan uses many icons in this novel to depict various aspects of life, characters, and culture in Halimunda society. Examples of dominant icons include wayang masks, brothels, skin care factories, and the presence of black cats. Each of these icons carries a deep meaning, representing or illustrating various themes present in the story, such as duality, social injustice, natural changes, and bad luck.

(2) Index, Indexes in the novel often link events or situations with concrete cause-and-effect. For example, footprints that indicate a character's movement, the presence of a natural disaster that triggers a crisis in the characters' lives. This gives depth to the narrative and clarifies the social, political and emotional context of the story.

(3) The symbols in "Cantik Itu Luka" are used to convey a more abstract and universal meaning. The color red, for example, symbolizes passion or danger; water symbolizes life and transformation; fire as a symbol of power or destruction; and cigarettes as a symbol of restlessness or limitation. These symbols help in deepening the interpretation of themes such as beauty, suffering, justice, and change in people's lives.

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