



Negotiating meaning: Audience reception of Ratih Kumala's *Gadis Kretek* and its film adaptation

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Abstract

Ratih Kumala's *Gadis Kretek*, inspired by her family's involvement in the kretek cigarette industry, was adapted into a film directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfansyah. As semi-autobiographical narratives, both the novel and its adaptation offer fertile ground for examining audience interpretation and cultural resonance. This study investigates readers' and viewers' receptions of *Gadis Kretek* through Focus Group Discussions, employing Reader-Response Theory as the primary analytical framework. The theory positions readers as active agents who construct meaning through their personal experiences, values, and socio-cultural contexts, challenging the notion of fixed authorial authority. Interpretation is thus viewed as a dynamic and dialogic process shaped by the interaction between the text and the audience. By situating reception within a collective interpretive context, this study seeks to illuminate how diverse audiences negotiate meaning and emotional engagement with both the novel and its cinematic adaptation.

Keywords: Meaning, interpretation, audience reception, reader-response, adaptation

Introduction

Background

Gadis Kretek is Ratih Kumala's novel exploring the history of Indonesia's traditional kretek industry, blending fictional elements of romance and family complexities. First published in 2012, the book immediately gained attention for its unique industry. In 2023, the series also received a broadly positive reception both at home and abroad.

The novel *GadisKretek* tells the story of a family's journey to dig up cigarettes.

The Djagadnata family's secret past is revealed, which is linked to the history of the traditional kretek industry. The story begins with Soeraja's illness, which worsens day by day. Soeraja, a woman he deeply loved when they were young. The woman's name is never publicly mentioned because it could anger his mother, Soeraja, his current wife. The youngest son takes the initiative to travel to Kudus to search for traces of Jeng Yah.

The novel *Gadis Kretek* (*Cretek Girl*) does not present a strictly historical plot. Instead, it jumps between the present and the past, depicting the history of the Indonesian kretek industry intertwined with Soeraja's personal history. The novel also presents the political and social changes in Indonesia from the colonial to the post-colonial era, depicting how the kretek industry developed through the character of Soeraja and his love story with Jeng Yah.

The TV series *Gadis Kretek*, available on Netflix, follows a love story between Soeraja and Jeng Yah, set against the backdrop of historical events in the traditional kretek industry and its contribution to Indonesian culture and the economy. While in the novel, the historical depiction of the kretek industry is presented in detail through the narrative of events experienced by the characters in the novel, which are presented in detail, in the TV series, the history of kretek is depicted with visual and auditory elements and elements of condensation and simplification of subplots. Unlike the novel, which presents the journeys of the characters in detail and becomes a subplot, in the TV series, the focus of the story is more on the romance between Jeng Yah and Soeraja and the characterization of Jeng Yah as a woman who is

strong, ambitious, and has high resilience to face various challenges. When studying a work originally in print and comparing it to an adaptation in the form of a TV series, it is clear that they will not be the same. The shift in medium necessitates changes to the adapted text—the script's length may be adjusted to match the episode length of a TV series. Some elements are added, but others are removed. The narrative structure of a novel also differs from that of a TV series—

Building audience engagement in each episode and keeping viewers coming back for more is a challenge in developing an adapted narrative structure. The popularity of the book and TV series *Gadis Kretek* has attracted several researchers to examine them from various perspectives. Dinata, Saharuddin, and Khairussibyan (2022) examined the internal structure of Ratih Kumala's novel using a Genetic Structuralism approach^[1]. Riskiyani and Nugraha were interested in the book's cultural codes.

The objectives of this article are to assess the success of the film adaptation in capturing the essence and themes conveyed by the novel; to explore the audience's opinions, perceptions, and satisfaction regarding the novel *Gadis Kretek* and its film adaptation; and to describe the benefits and challenges faced in the adaptation process.

This research is urgent since there is little research investigating audience opinion regarding the film adaptation of *GadisKretek* as well as the audience reception and response to the novel-to-film adaptation, is significant to understanding the impact of the adaptation process on the contemporary cinematic experience, and the results of this study can contribute to improving future adaptation practices and provide positive insights into audience engagement.

Narratology

Narratology is defined as the study of how narratives create meaning and the general mechanisms and procedures for narrative expression. Narratology is not a matter of reading and interpretation, but rather an attempt to study the nature of narrative as a concept and cultural practice. Another issue

often associated with discussions of narratology is the contrast between story and plot, or between story and discourse. A story is a sequence of events as they occur, while a plot is a sequence of events that have been edited, arranged, packaged, and presented in a narrative. Discourse refers to plot, but from a broader perspective, it is the packaging of the narrative that creates the overall effect. What differentiates literary texts from other texts is the style of language that is used to convey the information contained within them. Literary works have a narrative style that makes them so intimate with the soul of the reader of the literary text; a method to convey a message from the heart of the text creator to the hearts of the audience without the high walls of formality; allowing information to be conveyed in the form of an entity called a 'story'.

Reader-Response Theory

In the style of reading a literary text, the reader is not merely a 'passive reader' who reads the text page by page, but also actively participates. In other words, the reading process is reader-centered. Regarding the reader's role in reading a text, this concept was introduced through Reader-Response Theory, which was conceived in the 1920s and later developed by D.W. Harding and Louise Rosenblatt in 1938^[2]. The concept of Reader-Response Theory, developed by Louise Rosenblatt, is quite significant in providing a reader-centered understanding of the act of reading. In one of her works entitled "Literature as Exploration," published in 1938, Rosenblatt emphasized that the reader plays a significant role in every literary work. Later, his views on this theory were further developed by writing a book entitled "The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work," which was published in 1978. The ideas of reader response theorists often sound different from several ideas put forward by other theoretical perspectives. Interpreters analyze text as an independent entity or understand the meaning of the text separately from the reader's interaction^[3]. On the other hand, Rosenblatt argues that meaning can emerge from the interaction between the reader and the text, emphasizing that it is not contained solely in the text itself^[4], in his book "Literature as Exploration," touched on how the processes in the story affect the reader's feelings and how the reader interprets the text. Thus, the dynamics of the relationship between the reader and the text-giver give rise to meaning through the interpretations the reader makes; Rosenblatt's idea is indirectly in line with the notion that the meaning of a text comes from the text itself.

Rosenblatt also introduced a term called "transactional theory," which, in essence, explains the process of interpreting a text from the reader's perspective. Transactional Theory is further developed in Rosenblatt's book "The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work," a refinement of his previous work. According to Rosenblatt^[5], during the interpretive process in reading, the background and context of each reader are crucial in generating meaning between the reader and the text. There is a meeting between the reader and the text, and readers then bring their life experiences and feelings into how they read and interpret it.

Film Adaptation

In the process of adapting a novel to film, many natural elements are incorporated. Must change form. Some of

these elements include the setting, which is transformed from a descriptive narrative into a visual form. Characters also undergo similar changes. As Robert Stam argues, the shift from novel to film also represents a shift from an "aural medium, "limited only to words, to a multi-track medium like film, which is not limited only to words but also features theatrical performances, music, sound effects, and moving images^[6].

In his book entitled "Novels into Films," George Bluestone argues that changes resulting from film adaptations are inevitable when linguistic forms are transformed into visual ones^[7]. Although some experts consider the changes to be regular, they should not create a significant gap with the original novel. Quoting Cahir's opinion, for a film adaptation to be considered successful, it must not deviate too far from the original literary work. If it deviates too much, viewers will likely label the adaptation as "unfaithful" to the original work^[8].

Research Methods

This study aims to examine film adaptation, namely the transposition of a novel into a cinematic product, especially the narrative transfer from the book to the serial film. The novel *Gadis Kretek* is strongly imbued with the historical background of the traditional kretek industry. Meanwhile, the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek* narrates the romance between Jeng Yah and Soeraja and explores Jeng Yah's subjectivity as a woman in the traditional kretek industry. The shift in focus from historical novels to romances indicates the popularity of romance in the film industry. As Radway stated, the development of the relationship between male and female characters is the core of romance, an essential theme in the context of production and audience reception^[9].

Adaptation is a study that applies a hermeneutic approach, taking into account textual and contextual factors. This approach is abstract and lacks methodological systematicity. Its application often involves examining the differences between novels and films using semiotic theory^[10]. However, research focuses more on reviewing the forms of adaptation that make novels and films popular and how readers and audiences perceive these adaptations.

The data sources for this research are the novel and the Netflix series of the same title. Studying the adaptation also allows for the contextualization of the novel into a film. Therefore, this socio-cultural and spatio-temporal perspective needs to get special attention so that it can be used to understand changes in the values and impacts of these cultural products.

The series was a success. This also raised curiosity about why the novel was so successful. In this case, the success of a film adaptation is determined by its audience. Therefore, this study also recruited several informants to ask for their opinions on the adaptation of the novel into a film and what aspects of the film could engage viewers to continue watching until the final episode.

Linda Hutcheon is one of the academics who developed the theory of adaptation. Hutcheon discusses the biases that influence the debate about literature and film. One argument Hutcheon rejects is the notion that reading literature immerses readers in fantasy more than watching films. According to Hutcheon, time, irony, metaphor, and symbolism can differ between those presented in a novel and those in a movie, depending on the narrative changes made.

In contrast to Hutcheon, Thomas Leitch addresses the issue of the film's fidelity to

Novels. Leitch found that classic literary works undergo transcriptional changes for commercial purposes—plot changes are necessary to engage audiences in film better. Thus, adaptation is a standalone activity and does not focus on the source material.

In addition to Ratna Kumala's novel and its Netflix adaptation, researchers also collected data from three focus group discussions with 25 participants who had read the book or watched the film adaptation. The researchers posed questions to ensure a smooth conversation—during the discussion, participants' responses were recorded and transcribed, and then summarized.

Results and Discussion

Original Novel

It begins with Soeraja, the owner of Kretek Dagad Raja, a leading kretek factory in Indonesia, mentioning a woman named Jeng Yah during his critical period. This sparked deep jealousy from his wife, Purwanti, and the anxiety of his three heirs, Lebas, Tegar, and Karim. His three sons set off to explore several places in Java to fulfill their father's final request: to meet Jeng Yah. It is known that Jeng Yah is the owner of Kretek Gadis, the best-selling local kretek brand in Indonesia.

City M in its time. The assumption about the relationship between Jeng Yah and their father, Soeraja, was revealed, thus explaining the reason for their mother's raging jealousy. Jeng Yah was Soeraja's lover before he married Purwanti. In the search for Jeng Yah, Tegar, Lebas, and Karim seemed to uncover the secret of Kretek Dagad Raja's origin, inherited from their grandfather, Soedjagad. The ins and outs of kretek are closely related to the complicated love story of two generations between Idroes Moeria, Roemaisa, and Soedjagada, as well as Jeng Yah, Soeraja, and Purwanti.

In flashbacks, the story also tells of Tegar, the heir to Kretek Dagad Raja, who has been involved in the family kretek business since he was a teenager. It is also mentioned that Tegar was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement regarding the sauce recipe that makes their kretek the best. Without the savory sauce on the kretek, the authenticity of Kretek Djagad Rajais is nonexistent. Tegar also learned that price is as important as the quality of the tobacco and cloves used. This shaped Tegar into an objective and considerate person, even though he could be said to have lost his playtime. Lebas is the youngest child of Soeraja and Purwanti. Almost the opposite of his two older siblings, Lebas pursued the world of 'art' as a director of Bor C-class films. Lebas is free-spirited and quite eccentric, which often makes his family shake their heads. Both Rama and Tegar were quite strict in educating him. Since if they were not, who knows what would have happened to his less life.

Karim has the quality of a good mediator. His critical mission during the search for Jeng Yah is to ensure that his two brothers do not commit suicide. As Soedjagad's closest grandson, Karim knows enough about their grandfather's complicated story with Idroes Moeria and Roemaisa from Soedjagad's perspective.

The novel details the history of kretek cigarettes, which were rolled initially from corn husks into paper. The history and development of Kretek are extensively explored here.

The story revolves around Idroes Moeria's struggles in starting a home-based kretek cigarette business and his

business rivalry with Soedjagad. The rivalry, Dasiyah, described as having a strong talent and interest in the kretek cigarette business. She also successfully pioneered a popular kretek girl cigarette. In developing her business, Dasiyah was assisted by Soeraja, and from there, the two became close, reaching a point where they were going to get married. The marriage between Dasiyah was assisted by ambition. Soeraja wanted to own his own clove cigarette business, funded by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). As a result, Idroes Moeria and Dasiyah, described arrested by the military on suspicion of involvement with the party. Soeraja was busy saving his own skin in Soedjagad's warehouse. Soedjagad knows that Soeraja is a person who used to work for Idroes Moeria, and he considered him the key to defeating Idroes Moeria's kretek business. Soedjagad provided accommodation and employment for Soeraja. Since his arrival, sales of Proklamasi kretek have increased, and he has even launched a new kretek brand, Djagad Raja. Because of his significant contribution to the progress of the Djagad family's kretek business, Raja's name was included. However, Soedjagad emphasized that this was a family business, while Rajawas was not related to Djagad. Then, to achieve his ambition, Raja married Purwanti, Soedjagad's daughter, so he could be more involved in the Djagad Raja kretek business.

On the other hand, Idroes Moeria and Dasiyah, who were suspected of involvement, were forced to be detained for some time. In addition, the Merdeka kretek business that used red paper had to stop production because it was considered communist. In prison, Dasiyah met Sentot, a man who had once proposed to Dasiyah, was also a soldier. By using Sentot, Dasiyah and her father was able to get out of prison but on the condition that they no longer have any contact with Soeraja. Hearing about the marriage between Soeraja and Purwanti, Dasiyah came one day and hit Soeraja on the head with a Petromax slin because she knew that Raja stole the recipe for the girl's kretek sauce.

This fact was ultimately revealed by the King's three sons during their search.

Jeng Yah. Knowing and realizing Soeraja's mistake, Tegar sent Leba to meet Jeng Yah's remaining family members, namely her sister Rukayah and her daughter, Arum. Tegar offered to purchase the formula for Gadis' Kretek sauce officially and apologized for what Soeraja had done. Roekayah and Arum accepted the apology and offered to develop Gadis' kretek.

Netflix Adaptation Synopsis

Soeraja, the leader of Kretek Dagad Raja, is ill and being treated in his room. One night, he was delirious and calling out the name of a woman who was not his wife—Soeraja's wife, Purwanti. Jeng Yah was the name of the woman Soeraja mentioned. In his mind, flashes of memories of Jeng Yah—a beautiful woman wearing a white kebaya who had drifted away from her youth; himself wearing a wedding dress with a trail of blood on his forehead. In the chaos of Soeraja's mind, he tried to find something he felt was important—a box. And Soeraja asked Lebas to find Jeng Yah, handing him the box as he sobbed desperately. Before it was too late.

Lebas, Soeraja's youngest son, tries to calm down Ramanya—his father's nickname.

Later, he conveyed Ramanya's orders to his two older brothers, Tegar and Karim, regarding Jeng Yah. After that, Lebas ventured to City M to find out where Jeng Yah was.

JengYah is Dasiyah, the first daughter of Idroes Moeria, the owner of Merdeka Kretek business. Dasiyah is a reserved but intelligent person. Her knowledge of quality ingredients demonstrates her extraordinary skills in the kretek world. Her dream is to become a saucemaker—unfortunately, that position is practically impossible for her to obtain saucemaker. Pak Dibjo, believing that women would make ketchup taste bad. One day, Mr. Idroes and Dasiyah encountered a man fighting in the middle of the market. Feeling sorry for him, Mr. Idroes. His name was Soeraja.

Young Soeraja helped Kretek Merdeka a lot after he entered Pak Idroes' residence. This made Dasiyah feel uncomfortable, as he was a man. However, it turned out that Soeraja had no other motive than to benefit himself. Instead, Soerajawas was willing to help Dasiyah realize her dream of becoming a sauce maker. Soeraja even gave Dasiyah the key to the sauce room so she could go in and mix her own sauce.

Lebas met Arum in the search for Jeng Yah. Arum was a donor at the Kretek Museum that Lebas visited. She claimed to be the daughter of Rukayah, Dasiyah's younger sister. Eventually, Arum learned that Leba was the son of the owner of Kretek Dagad Raja. A misunderstanding arose between the two, but they continued their journey. The search for Jeng Yah continued with Lebas and Arum examining the letters in the museum's donation storage room.

The adventures of Lebas and Arum in their search for the truth about Jeng Yah are colored with many surprising facts. Starting from the fact that Arum's father, Seno Aji, was engaged to Dasiyah—Arum's aunt—and the fact that Dasiyah began to feel the emergence of feelings for the young Soeraja. So did Soeraja for Dasiyah. One day, when Dasiyah came out of the sauce room to mix rose-based sauce, Mr. Dibjo, Mr. Idroes, and Soeraja were in the backyard, chatting. Mr. Dibjo, who had allowed a woman to enter the sauce room, was furious to see Dasiyah's actions. Not only that, but Mr. Dibjo was also offended when Dasiyah later expressed her opinion that Kretek Merdeka should immediately innovate so as not to lose out to Mr. Djagad's Kretek Proklamasi.

Soeraja tried to comfort Dasiyah, but Dasiyah felt trapped by Soeraja.

Finally, Dasiyah expressed her frustration and disappointment in Soeraja. She said she saw him conducting business with several people who visited the Merdeka Kretek factory. After explaining what had really happened, Soeraja finally dared to confess his feelings to Dasiyah. Soeraja admitted that he had received an opportunity to obtain capital. He felt he had to prove himself to Dasiyah, the life she deserved.

Lebas and Arum continued reading the unread letter. The letter was kept in a box that Lebas's father, Soeraja, had given him. After reading the letter, they put it back in the box. Arum also found a way to open another compartment in the box, which contained several more letters. It turned out the letter was about Dasiyah and Soeraja's secret lovemaking in Dasiyah's room.

The following day, a sudden downpour of Proclamation leaflets was scattered by airplane. From this, Mr. Idroes revealed that Mr. Djagad, the owner of Proclamation Kretek, indeed had a personal grudge against Mr. Idroes. This was because both men had a crush on Dasiyah's mother, Mrs. Roemaisa. Because Mrs. Roemaisa married

Mr. Idroes, Mr. Djagad seemed to have a revenge agenda, which he openly expressed by competing with Merdeka Kretek.

Soeraja's business with the Red Party members was going well. He was even offered a position with the party. However, he chose to remain with Mr. Idroes. Dasiyah appreciated Soeraja's actions by giving her a special tingwe (spicy sauce) she made. Lebas took Arum home when it was already night time. However, Lebas had to help clean Arum's house because of the flood; one of Arum's roof tiles had shifted 20 times, causing a leak. The two of them chatted after eating, then continued rereading the letters.

At the end-of-year party, everyone gathered in Mr. Idroes' yard to have fun: playing with fireworks, roasting corn, and playing cards. Seno unexpectedly visited and met Dasiyah. That night, Dasiyah was not ready to marry Seno, as she had already been in love with someone else. Although implicitly, Seno could already guess that Soerajawas the man Dasiyah liked. Nevertheless, Seno insisted that Dasiyah could still rely on him.

Dasiyah and Soeraja admitted that they loved each other in front of Mr. Idroes and Mrs.

Roemaisa. Dasiyah also expressed her desire to have her engagement to Seno annulled.

This angered Dasiyah's parents. Soeraja was then thrown out of the house by Mr. Idroes.

Several days passed, and Soeraja continued living in his new home outside of Mr Idroes' house. Ashe entered a cafe; the radio reported the discovery of the bodies of six generals and one Indonesian Army officer at Lubang Buaya. It was suspected that a political party in Indonesia was carrying out a rebellion. Meanwhile, Soeraja met with Mr. Idroes. At that time, Soeraja explained that Dasiyah was a talented child. He then gave Mr. Idroes some of Dasiyah's homemade tingwe. Long story short, Mr. Idroes some of Dasiyah and Soeraja's relationship. After tasting Dasiyah's ting we with his sauce, Mr. Idroes' Kretek Factory launched Kretek Gadis. When Soeraja went to the printing factory to pick up an order for Mr. Idroes' kretek labels and his wedding invitations to Dasiyah, he met Mr. Djagad. Mr. Djagad persuaded Soeraja to work for him by offering him three times the salary. Idroes was offering. However, he humbly declined the offer. After Mr. Djagad left the printing factory, the printing company owner gave Soeraja a package of ready-made Red Kretek labels.

The radio reported that the government had issued a Letter of Instruction on March 11th disbanding the Red Party and its mass organizations from operating in the Republic of Indonesia. This was related to the deaths of seven officers on September 30th of last year.

Lebas received a call from Tegar in the middle of the night. Throughout the call,

Tegar asked Lebas to attend an important meeting. Arum's mother, Rukayah, overheard the conversation and eventually woke up. Seeing Lebas on the phone while putting out cigarette he had just smoked, Rukayah remembered Soeraja.

Rukayah's mother's health deteriorated drastically, requiring hospitalization. While chatting, Lebas expressed his confusion about why his father, Soeraja, married his mother, Purwanti. Arum was shocked to hear this. Meanwhile, the story continues in Soeraja's youth. Over the phone, Lebas asked Ramanya about Jeng Yah's arrest. Pak Idroes' house was suddenly raided by a group of soldiers. Pak Idroes and

Soeraja's names were on the list, but someone whispered that Soeraja's had been omitted. Long story short, Dasiyah and Pak Idroes were detained. During this detention, Pak Idroes had to meet the end of his life.

In fact, Soeraja wanted to save Dasiyah and Pak Idroes. However, a soldier shot him in the leg, and Dasiyah also ordered Soerajato to save himself. During his escape, he lost consciousness in Mr Djagad's tobacco storage. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Mr Djagad launched another operation to make a deal with Soeraja. If he were willing to help Mr. Djagad defeat Kretek Gadis, Soeraja would be helped to find Dasiyah. At that moment, Mr Djagad informed Soeraja that Mr Idroes was no longer alive.

Comparison of Novel to Movie Adaptation

In the adaptation process, the story of the Kretek Girl in the printed version is more.

Emphasises the history of kretek cigarettes in Indonesia from the independence era to the beginning of the Reformation. Compared to the adaptation series, which focuses more on the romance between Jengyah and Soeraja, this is clearly evident in the dense timeline applied to the visual media.

There is also the character of Arum Cengkeh, who plays a much more significant role when featured in the series. In the novel, Arum Cengkeh's character is only shown at the end of the story, in her situation. However, there is a significant shift in Arum's character. She appears at the end of the first episode and regularly serves as a character essential to the story's development, altering the passive impressions she presented in the novel. Arum tries to find out the identity of his aunt, who is actually her mother and has been kept a secret. There is even a scene where Arum destroys the wooden wall in her house to reveal the secret. This scene represents a profound difference between the character of Arum Cengkeh in the novel *Gadis Kretek* and the adaptation. In the novel *Gadis Kretek*, the character Idroes Moeria is described as a worker, a hard worker who never gives up in his efforts to achieve his dreams. This is evidence of how Idroes Moeria started his klobot business. This trait is also demonstrated by when he was about to propose to Roemaisa and in developing his kretek business. However, when adapted into a series, Idroes Moeria was introduced as Dasiyah's father, a successful, stable kretek businessman. Idroes Moeria's character, depicted as a hardworking never-giver-upper, was briefly lost. Furthermore, the depiction of Idroes being willing to be cheated by at tobacco trader at the beginning of the story diminishes the image of Idroes Moeria's never-give-up attitude and tenacity.

There are differences in the names of the parties and cigarettes shown in the novel and series. While in the novel *Gadis Kretek* the names of the PKI party and the Arit Merah kretek cigarettes are stated openly and clearly, in the series, the names are changed to the Red Party and Red Kretek. Given the G30S/PKI incident's importance to the *Gadis Kretek* novel storyline, the series maintains its leading indicators, including the party and the kretek cigarettes in question.

Focus Group Discussion

The results of the Focus Group Discussion will be displayed based on the questions the researcher asked, with each question shown with the percentage of responses from the participants.

Question 1: How would you describe the main characters in this novel? Which characters do readers/viewers relate to, and which are the most likable?

Dasiyah, the main character in *Gadis Kretek*, was the most frequently mentioned character in the favorite character question, with 25% of the vote. This result demonstrates Dasiyah's presence in the story as a protagonist and the author's success in directing readers' attention to hero vs other characters.

Idroes and Lebas ranked second with 16% of the total, as they were the most frequently mentioned characters. Furthermore, Lebas was the character readers felt most connected to because of his adventurous spirit and sense of humor. Readers admired Idroes Moeria for his determination, vision, and perseverance. Roemaisa, with a 12% share, is in third place as the character most liked. Readers admire Roemaisa's steadfastness and loyalty to her husband, Idroes Moeria. According to participants' further explanations, Roemaisa is the most developed character in the novel *Gadis Kretek*: Because she is presented and depicted as a very feminine young girl at first, but after conflict arises, Roemaisa develops into a wiser and braver person who expresses heroine attitude and opinion in order to maintain her husband's business and protect herself from Soedjagad's advances.

Soeraja or Raja is a character who has varying views in the eyes of readers. Some readers see Raja as ambitious and realistic, which is a positive aspect. Meanwhile, others tend to see Raja as a selfish or self-centered person. This trait is considered negative because most of his actions and life choices benefit him personally while harming others. In the Focus Group Discussion, participants agreed that Raja's approach to choose and action was driven by his desire to survive. Tegar and Rukayah were in fifth place with 6% each. Tegar was cited as the character most connected with readers, especially as the eldest child. Since Tegar's character is the eldest son of Raja who from a very young age has been prepared as the heir to the *Dajagad Raja Kretek* business, Tegar tends to be strict with his younger siblings, especially Lebas.

Meanwhile, Rukayah is the youngest child, unlike her older sister, Dasiyah. The participants viewed Rukayah as a more significant character than Dasiyah because she is not depicted as having the firm determination, ambition, and independence of her sister. In addition, the participants agreed that Rukayah's contribution to the plot of *Gadis Kretek's* novel is not as substantial as that of Roemaisa and Dasiyah. This is because both of their roles are very involved in the Kretek business industry. Rukayah mostly spends her time playing around.

Question 2: Who is the most interesting character besides the main character?

Tegar was the most frequently mentioned character in the category of most interesting supporting characters, receiving 50% of participants' responses. Tegar received positive reactions due to his structured personality, clear life goals, and significant role in finding Dasiyah. Furthermore, Tegar's interactions with his siblings, especially Lebas, add depth and family tension to the story. Karim's, Tegar, with 20%. Karim is often seen as the mediator between Tegar and Lebas, trying to keep the peace when conflicts arise within the family. He also possesses valuable information about the

King's past, such as the scar on his forehead from Mbah Djagad.

Karim's presence adds intensity to the story even though he is not the protagonist.

The characters involved in the love triangle, Soedjagad, Idroes Moeria, and Roemaisa, secure their place as interesting supporting characters with 10% each. Soedjagad and Idroes' rivalry in pursuing Roemaisa can be considered the starting point of *Gadis Kretek's* story. Therefore, Djagad and Idroes competed not only for Roemaisa's love but also for the Kretek industry, which continues to the next generation.

Question 3: What is the Raja's motivation and purpose in life?

Participants perceived Raja's motivation as simply survival or freedom. Initially, Soeraja is portrayed as someone who seeks freedom and a nomadic lifestyle but later shows a tendency to settle down, particularly with Dasiyah at first but later shifting to Purwanti.

Her opportunistic and realistic approach to life, along with her evolving relationships and decisions throughout the novel, makes her a prominent figure in *Gadis Kretek*. Her choices affect the lives of other characters and drive the story forward.

Question 4: What is the background story and setting of the novel *Gadis Kretek*? How does the setting influence the plot?

Participants considered the King's motivation to be solely to survive or be free.

Soerai is portrayed as someone who initially seeks freedom and a nomadic lifestyle, but later shows a tendency to settle down, particularly with Dasiyah at first, and later with Purwanti. His opportunistic nature and realistic approach to life, along with the development, make him a prominent character in *Gadis Kretek*. His decisions affect the characters in the plot. When the first question was asked, only 11 participants mentioned their background.

Regarding the background story in their answers, 54.5% of participants stated that the G30 S/PKI incident impacted the plot due to the conflict between the Soeraja and Dasiyah families. Furthermore, 45.5% of participants believed the colonial era also created other conflicts and plot points. For example, when Idroes was kidnapped in Surabaya, he began to learn more about the popularity of kretek cigarettes in the city.

Question 5: How does the main conflict in this novel develop and resolve? Do you feel that the conflicts sharpen the characters' characterizations?

Participants agreed that the novel's conflict certainly shapes the characters. The story becomes more poignant. One participant stated that the conflict during the development of the Kretek business motivated Idroes' character to be more active in maintaining and innovating his business. Three participants argued that the conflict focused on the rivalry between Soedjagad and Idroes in the novel. One participant also argued that the conflict during Soeraja and Dasiyah's separation made Dasiyah focus on her business, and one participant stated that Lebas's efforts to find Dasiyah also made Lebas less apathetic.

Question 6: What themes are raised in the novel *Gadis Kretek*, such as love, friendship, or others? Are these themes conveyed well?

Participants agreed that the themes were delivered effectively, especially the theme of hard work represented by Idroes and the business rivalry between Soedjagad and Idroes. Other participants also agreed that the theme of love was delivered in this novel by stating that the love story between Idroes and Roemaisa was well written in the novel, but the love story between Soeraja and Dasiyah was not as romantic as the love story between Idroes and Roemaisa, that is why the participants had two answers: no and yes.

Question 7: How do you think the film adaptation of *Gadis Kretek* compares to the original novel?

100% the four participants who answered this question stated that the film adaptation was different from the novel. The other focus of the book and its adaptation is highlighted. While the film focuses on the romantic story between Dasiyah and Raja, the novel explores the history of Kretek, the rivalry between Idroes and Jagad, and more. And then one participant also mentioned that feminism was inserted into the film adaptation. In the book, Dasiyah's challenge as a woman making kretek sauce for Idroes, her company, is not as evident because Idroes, as a father, provides sufficient facilities and support to Dasiyah, even though she is a woman, to develop her kretek sauce. In the film, the element of Idroes' support is weakened by Idroes' neglectful attitude when Dasiyah is prohibited by her father's employee, who is in charge of making the sauce, from entering the sauce-making room because of the myth that women are not allowed to enter the sauce-making room. If she enters, the sauce will become sour and will no longer taste good. This is the challenge as a woman, and the feminist idea is inserted in the film adaptation.

Question 8: What do you think about the casting of the main characters in this film?

50% thought the casting in the film adaptation was good, while the other 50% thought it was poor. Two participants considered the main character, Dasiyah, to be good. They believed Dian Sastrowas was ideally suited to the role, both in terms of her accent and gait.

One participant argued that Lebas had a better attitude in the film adaptation. Another participant argued that Roekayah's actress, Tissa Biani, was unsuitable for the role due to her appearance. The participant claimed that a Javanese person should have played Roekayah. Roekayah's character was rated. She was too "modern" for a Javanese woman of that time. Her skin tone was not dark enough for Javanese women in general, and her dress style was too westernized.

Question 9: Do you think this film successfully conveys the main themes of the novel *Gadis Kretek* well?

75% of respondents felt the film adaptation failed to convey the novel's main themes. Participants argued that romance was the central theme in the film adaptation and, as a result, the equally essential themes in the book, such as the rivalry between Idroes and Jagad, were not conveyed well.

Then 25% of the participants thought that the theme of hard work in the novel was transferred from Idroes to Dasiyah, therefore, the theme was still conveyed well even though there were changes in the character's characteristics.

Question 10: Do you think this film successfully captures and describe the characteristics of the main characters in this novel.

100% of the responses from participants who answered this question considered that

The film adaptation could not portray the novel's characters well. Participants argued that the additional problems for Dasiyah in the film adaptation in the sauce room made her character look different. There were also arguments about the rivalry between Idroes and Jagad that was not portrayed well, the history of Kretek that was not shown much, even though it could add to the audience's knowledge about the history of the love triangle story between Idroes, Roemaisa, and Jagad, which would make sense when the audience saw the fierce business competition between Idroes and Jagad in marketing their Kretek (Merdeka and Proklamasi), and the story of the relationship between Dasiyah and Rajah looked different.

Question 11: How does it end?

Participants found the film adaptation's ending more complex.

Compared to the novel, the ending is simpler: the problem is simply the theft of the sauce; Lebas simply compensates Roekayah's family, resolving the conflict. In the film adaptation, many things happen at the end, including betrayal, Dasiyah's second chance with Raja, an apology, and even redemption.

Conclusion

This study reveals that Kumala's novel, *Gadis Kretek*, and its Netflix adaptation, directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfanyah, offer a complex interplay between personal, cultural, and historical narratives. Through Reader-Response analysis and audience reception via Focus Group Discussions, it demonstrates that readers and viewers actively construct meaning based on their own cultural backgrounds, emotional engagements, and interpretive frameworks. The findings affirm Rosenblatt's transactional theory, which holds that meaning emerges through a dynamic interaction between the text and the reader or viewer.

The responses illustrate that while the novel is valued for its detailed portrayal of the Indonesian kretek industry and its reflection of national identity and social change, the film adaptation gains attention through its visual aesthetics, emotional appeal, and emphasis on romance. Participants generally agree that the adaptation shifts the focus from the socio-historical narrative of the kretek industry to Dasiyah's personal and emotional journey, re-centering the story around gender and agency. This transformation highlights the adaptive process as not merely a matter of fidelity but of creative interpretation, as discussed by Hutcheon (2006)^[11] and Bluestone (1957)^[7].

The differences between the novel and its adaptation illustrate the inherent negotiation in any adaptation process: between textual faithfulness and audience accessibility, between historical narrative and emotional resonance. The film's feminist undertones—absent or subtle in the novel—reflect contemporary sensibilities and the directors' interpretive intervention. Meanwhile, the audience's mixed responses to character portrayal, theme emphasis, and historical representation indicate that the adaptation is a site of dialogic meaning-making in which text, medium, and audience continuously interact.

In conclusion, *Gadis Kretek* demonstrates how Indonesian literature and film can function as cultural texts that both preserve and reinterpret national narratives. The study underscores the importance of audience participation in constructing meaning and suggests that adaptation should be viewed as a creative act of cultural translation rather than mere reproduction.

Recommendation

Future research may extend this study by involving a larger and more diverse audience sample to capture regional and generational differences in reception. Comparative studies with other Indonesian literary adaptations could also deepen understanding of adaptation strategies and audience engagement within local cinematic contexts. Moreover, further exploration of gender representation and historical authenticity in Indonesian adaptations could enrich interdisciplinary dialogue among literature, film, and cultural studies.

The Author's Note

This article was written based on the research conducted by the Literature and Cultural Studies Research Group with the contract No. 194.2/UN27.22/PT.01.03/2024—all interpretations and conclusions represent the author's own perspective and do not involve the use of automated writing systems.

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