

Intermediality: Audience Reception of “Gadis Kretek”

Diva Alayna Suwito^{1*}, Ade Putranto Prasetyo Wijiharto Tunggal²

^{1,2} Communication Sciences Department of ‘Aisyiyah Yogyakarta University, 55292, Indonesia

Corresponding author’s email: divaalayna29@gmail.com, ade.putra.tunggal@unisayogya.ac.id

ABSTRACT

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Gadis Kretek is a historical fiction novel by Ratih Kumala that has been adapted into a Netflix series directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfanyah. Both works with two media often cause debate because they are considered less able to meet the expectations of the audience, especially those who read the source work. This study aims to examine how audience perceive the intermediality of the novel and the Netflix series of Gadis Kretek. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type that will be analyzed using Stuart Hall’s reception theory which consists of three positions, namely Dominant Position, Negotiation Position, and Opposition Position. The results of this study show that the changes that occur in the novel and the Netflix series of Gadis Kretek can interfere with a person’s viewing experience, and the relationship between the two media affects each other.

1. Introduction

The novel *Gadis Kretek* by Ratih Kumala is a literary work that tells about the development of the kretek industry since the Dutch colonial period. The novel was first published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2012 and was included in the top ten recipients of the 2012 Kusala Sastra Khatulistiwa award. *Gadis Kretek* has also been adapted into a Netflix series directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfanyah which has aired on November 2, 2023 with a total of 5 episodes.

Gadis Kretek tells a unique story about history, especially about the movement of the industry at the beginning of its establishment in Indonesia. The novel has gone through its tenth reprint in August 2023. This novel is one of the most popular and talked about literary works. This can be seen from the reviews and ratings on the Goodreads.com platform, which in June 2024 reached a rating of 4.14/5 stars (Goodreads *Gadis Kretek*, 2012) Through the Netflix series, the story of *Gadis Kretek* has received more attention from the Indonesian public. With this change in media, people, especially those who have read the novel, have expectations of the series, so audience interest is high.

In an article from Antara News, it was stated that Netflix series *Gadis Kretek* ranked 10th on the global Non-English TV list with 1.6 million views in just one week for the week ending November 12, 2023. The article stated that *Gadis Kretek* also ranked in the weekly top 10 in six countries, including maintaining the top spot for two consecutive weeks in Indonesia and securing 5th place in Malaysia for weeks two and three. (Ashari, 2023)

The process of adapting a work from one medium to another is called transferring the vehicle or in the world of literature, especially in changing novels to films, it is called ekranization. The transformation of the literary work will certainly undergo changes because it is adapted to the new media it uses. Transformation can also be said as a transfer or exchange from one form to another, which can eliminate, move, or replace elements such as the transformation of novels to films (Bungsuna Manggala, 2022)

However, this change in media often causes dissatisfaction for some viewers, especially those who have previously read the novel. This is because the reader's freer imagination seems to be restricted when watching similar works in the movie medium. Sapardi Djoko Damono, in his book entitled "Alih Wahana" said that in daily conversations or in some writings, we often meet statements that express anger or irritation or disappointment because it turns out that movies based on novels are not faithful to their sources. Some scenes are cut, some endings are changed, some parts are shifted and many movies add many things that are not in the novel (Damono, 2018). So in this study, the researcher will examine how audiences as book readers and viewers of the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek* accept the relationship between media and opinions when watching a series adapted from a novel.

2. Method

In this study, researchers will use a qualitative approach with descriptive research. Descriptive research aims to explain or describe a situation as it is and interpret objects according to what they are, events, or everything related to variables that can be explained either with numbers or words. Descriptive research is mostly not intended to test certain hypotheses, but rather to describe what a variable, symptom, or situation is (Zellatifanny & Mudjiyanto, 2018) The subjects in this study were novel readers and viewers of the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek*.

Data were collected by means of interviews, observation, documentation, and literature study. The informants in this study are either readers of the novel *Gadis Kretek* or viewers of the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek* or both. Observation was done by watching the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek*, while literature study was done by reading the novel *Gadis Kretek*. Interviews were conducted virtually through Instagram or WhatsApp digital media conversations. The method of analysis used is Stuart Hall's reception theory. The common thread of the reception concept is that the audience actively participates in understanding the content or message they receive. Literary reception is how readers interpret the literary works they read and then give responses or reactions to these literary works (Riskylia, 2020). Data presentation will be displayed with selected scenes that include audio and visual that will be perceived by informants. In addition, it also presents the results of interviews and informants' opinions about the intermediality of the novel and the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek*.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Audience Reception Analysis

Reception analysis provides an explanation of how audiences understand a show. Symbols, messages, and signs are considered the main meaning of a scene or show. The common thread of the concept of reception is that the audience actively participates in understanding the content or messages they receive. Literary reception is how readers interpret the literary works they read and then give responses or reactions to these literary works (Riskylia, 2020). Reception analysis seeks to explore the existence of selective exposure in the minds of the audience in order to emphasize the positioning of the audience on media messages, by comparing the construct of selective exposure to researchers found in preferred reading (Pujarama & Yustisia, 2020).

There are three reception positions according to Stuart Hall, namely: (1) Dominant Position. Audiences see events of media content in the same way when they are in the same place. Audiences have the ability to actually receive the message or meaning that the media wants to convey. (2) Negotiated Position. In this situation, the audience will accept the overall meaning and consider further before fully agreeing with it. Audiences agree with the ideologi broadcast by the media, but they consider further to be part of it. (3) Oppositional Position. Audiences in this situation are not aligned in interpreting in the impressions projected by the media. They think and see in contradictory ways, and they completely reject the messages and meanings in the media. People in an oppositional position will strongly oppose the messages they receive.

The transfer of a work from written form to audio-visual work will certainly undergo many changes to adjust the media used. Likewise, the various changes and differences that exist in the book and the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek* are a problem that is quite interesting to be perceived by the audience regarding their satisfaction in receiving the work. The novel *Gadis Kretek* has 274 pages with 15 chapters that use a back and forth plot. Meanwhile, in the series, *Gadis Kretek* has 5 episodes, each of

which has a duration of about 1 hour. In this study, it focuses on the opinions of audiences related to these media changes and how they view some of the scenes that will have been selected by researchers.

1. Audience Reception of Media Changes

In this section, the researcher tries to find out how audiences think about the media changes that occur in the story of *Gadis Kretek*. In the adaptation process, the changes that occur are generally to develop the story and adjust the duration. However, the difference will be very clear, the same person will have a different experience when reading and then watching the adaptation work. Novels make us see through mental images while movies make us see through visual images. A movie adaptation can be 'more' or 'less' than the original. That is why audiences often complain why movies are not 'faithful' to the source (Damono, 2018).



Figure 1. *Gadis Kretek* Novel Poster

Source: (*Gadis Kretek (Cover Baru 2019)*, 2019)



Figure 2. *Gadis Kretek* Netflix series Poster

Source: (Mellya, 2023)

"Honestly, I was surprised, hahaha. The series that I really like, it's not the same for the book. The different mediums turned out to have different treatments, and I don't think that's a problem. Adaptation work doesn't always have to 'obey' the reference work. It's free, adjusted to the medium." (Informant 1, April 21, 2024)

In her narrative, Informant 1 has understood that the differences and changes that occur in an adapted work are natural and do not always have to be the same as the original work. Therefore, Informant 1 belongs to the dominant position because she fully accepts the message conveyed by the media.

"Oh, it's very different. If you ask where, maybe in the feel. When we read it, we play in our minds, like groping for the situation, there are some parts that I think are omitted in the series so it's like, "huh, what is this," especially in the scene between Purwanti and Jeng Yah's mother, even though the book tells details, and I think that's the common thread there. So, if I may rate it, actually the series is 7/10. It still loses to my fantasy when I read the book hehehe." (Informant 2, May 10, 2024)

"Actually, for me personally, it does have an impact because it doesn't match the expectations of the audience who read the novel and then watched the movie. But with this difference, it can still add to the reference experience of readers and viewers... For changes in the reduction or addition of story details, it does have an impact, but from my personal point of view, it can add to the reference experience in watching, because as far as I know it is also very common when the story from the novel is adapted into a series." (Informant 4, May 29, 2024)

Similarly, Informants 2 and 4 argued that they were more inclined to the story in the book, so they had high expectations of what they imagined. In this case, they accepted the differences, but were also quite disturbed. The new media adaptation cannot fulfill everyone's expectations, because

of course a story has gone through a reception by the director and scriptwriter. Thus, Informants 2 and 4 are in a negotiation position, because they accept the message conveyed by the media, but some parts of themselves still reject it.

"In my opinion, changing media from novel to movie is a very difficult thing to do. This is because each reader has their own depiction of each character and setting in the story. Therefore, there needs to be in-depth research when casting the movie whether the character fits the outline of the depiction in the novel. Because, often the depiction in the novel does not match what is in the movie. This makes readers quite disappointed. Therefore, I would rather watch the movie or series first than read the novel first. Because it does not spoil the depiction of the story in my mind." (Informant 3, May 19, 2024)

"I think it's good to go from novel to movie, for the film industry, especially in Indonesia. Because Indonesia is really famous for soap operas, but now many movies are based on novels, so that's good. If it disturbs the viewing experience, maybe not, but for people who like to read, maybe yes, because it doesn't match their imagination." (Informant 5, June 11, 2024)

"From the point of view of people who have read the book, yes, the changes disturb my own experience. It's like I had already dipped into that world, so I already had my own expectations, when I dipped in a second time to 'repeat' the memories I already had, it turned out to be different from what I expected. Of course it made me a little 'disturbed' because it wasn't the world I knew before. Gadis Kretek (Cigarette Girl) is about Jeng Yah. The main point of the story is in her, so I understand a bit why the plot of the series jumps straight to the main point. It's not only to streamline the duration time. But the series seems to forget that Gadis Kretek is a fictionalized history of kretek from Kota M, Kudus, Surabaya, to Jakarta. She is not a 'Cigarette Girl' without a long history, although the main point is there but like being wrapped in a different body. Can you imagine a figure you know suddenly living in someone else's body? It's like knowing but not knowing. But for people who come as an open-minded viewer, I think they will feel that this is one of the great series, as evidenced by how booming it was when it was first released on Netflix. That's because it's a new experience for them, and they don't know any other body of Gadis Kretek." (Informant 6, June 12, 2024)

In this case, Informant 3 has watched the series, but has not read the novel. So, she argues that it is better to watch the adaptation first so as not to spoil the expectations or depiction of the story in her mind. It can be concluded that she believes that adaptations can interfere with the viewing experience of someone who has first read the original work. Therefore, Informant 3 falls into the negotiation position.

From this explanation, it can be concluded that Informants 3, 5, and 6 belong to the negotiation position. Informants 3 and 5 are viewers who have not read the novel. They argue that they enjoy audio-visual works adapted from literary works, but they also realize that the possibility of the adaptation can interfere with the viewing experience of someone who has first read the novel. Informant 6 was a reader who later watched the series. She actually strongly rejected the content of the Netflix series Gadis Kretek, because she thought it did not match what she was familiar with, and the viewing experience disturbed her. But on the other hand, she also said that the series would be well enjoyed by viewers who came without first knowing the other 'body' of Gadis Kretek.

2. Audience Reception of the Scene at Kota M Station

Researchers also find out informants' views regarding scenes in the series that were not previously in the book. Namely the scene where Soeraja meets Jeng yah at Kota M train station. They talked and promised to live a new life together. Even though in that position, they both have children and their respective spouses. So, the researcher is interested in finding out the informants' opinions regarding their actions in this scene.



Figure 3. Scene 1, *Gadis Kretek* episode 5

"I have quite a mixed-feeling there. On the one hand, I'm happy that they can meet again and want to live together. The problem is that being trapped in the wrong marriage is really uncomfortable. On the other hand, I'm really against infidelity. No matter what the past is like, I don't condone their relationship when they are both married. It's not fair to their partner." (Informant 1, June 11, 2024)

"Yes, it's really stupid, I was also dumbfounded. That's one of the scenes that wasn't in the book but managed to give me goosebumps all over... I think it's true that feelings for someone are hard to guess, when to start and finish. No matter how hard you hold yourself back, if your inner want is still willing, still desiring, still strong, well... anything can happen." (Informant 2, May 10, 2024)

"Raja and Jeng Yah are a couple with deep memories and love. In contrast, Raja married his wife only to expand his career experience. Of course, this is a despicable act because Raja has no responsibility for what he has chosen for his own life. In addition, Raja's actions will teach the audience bad things, because Raja's actions are actions that betray his wife or he is still labeled as cheating. Because there is no such thing as a relationship between a man and a woman going that far or kissing. However, as a viewer, I also don't fully blame Raja and Jeng Yah because I think Jeng Yah cannot be replaced by anyone in Raja's heart, and vice versa." (Informant 3, May 19, 2024)

From the explanations of the three informants, it can be concluded that they have their own opinions regarding Jeng Yah and Raja's actions in the scene. Informant 1 has the opinion that they did an unjustified act even though she also has a speck of sympathy for their relationship. Informant 2 thinks that their actions are very stupid, but she also recognizes that one's feelings, in this case Jeng Yah and Raja, cannot be easily regulated according to their own wishes. Informant 3 also viewed the scene from two perspectives, so that in this scene, Informants 1, 2, and 3 were in the negotiation position. They think that the act is wrong and should not be done, but they also cannot fully blame the act.

"As for the scene of Jeng Yah and Raja kissing at the station, it's actually not in the novel. If you look at it from my point of view in the norms of society in particular, it is clearly not justified, considering the position of Raja who already had a child and wife at that time and was done in a public place like the station." (Informant 4, May 29, 2024)

"That's the most stupid scene. I feel bad for Jeng Yah, like, she's already beautiful, why would she keep a guy like that. But I also feel bad for Raja, like, why do you give hope, but the action is not gentle enough. Raja is not assertive with himself so he's like hanging Jeng Yah." (Informant 5, June 11, 2024)

"When art becomes a business, its value will fall. One of them is with some unnecessary romance scenes like that, maybe this even goes into criticism... because they seem to make the moral elements of the story a bit tainted. Some scenes also don't match the adaptation of the old setting, some are too bold, and too forced to be romanticized. From the history of kretek that should be the gong, they prefer to give more attention to the love story. Which diminishes the value of Jeng Yah herself as a smart inspirational woman." (Informant 6, June 12, 2024)

In contrast to the opinions of the previous informants, Informants 4, 5 and 6, belong to the oppositional position, as they reject media messages because they are different from their knowledge or values. Informant 4 argued that the act was not in accordance with the norms prevailing in society, so she could not justify the behavior. Informant 5 said that the scene shows that each character cannot be firm with their own attitude and self. Meanwhile, Informant 6 argued that adaptations often add scenes that are not suitable and actually reduce the value of the main theme of this story, which is the history of kretek, and romanticize their love story more.

3. Audience Reception of Jeng Yah

Another scene that can be assessed by informants is the scene where Jeng Yah is lent masculinity traits such as working and smoking, but it still cannot make her an independent woman. She wants independence, but she always loses when compared to men.



Figure 4. Scene 2, Jeng Yah smoking episode 1



Figure 5. Scene 3, Jeng Yah working episode 1

In the novel, the portrayal of Dasiyah or Jeng Yah who is lent masculinity is as follows;

Actually, it was Dasiyah who really tasted the kreteks, especially on afternoons when drinking the tea like now. (Kumala, 2023)

"I am the boss. So no one gets mad at me." (Kumala, 2023)

Audience opinions on Jeng Yah's character are as follows,

"Yes, I totally agree with the word 'loaned'. She got that from her father. Actually, as a woman, she has the privilege of being born into a wealthy family and has the 'freedom' to choose what she wants. For example, making kretek sauce and choosing a husband. Unfortunately, the condition of the country at that time was not good. The time setting has a big impact on the story, not just a patch. If the setting was taken in the present, it's likely that Jeng Yah could be a fully independent woman. Well, but back again ... the Red Party (Partai Merah) or PKI at that time was hot. The situation that made Jeng Yah's life so sad." (Informant 1, April 21, 2024)

"Actually, this is the same case as when I worked at the café. Well, if I may tell you, I still smoke, but passively, once a week or rarely, but the café people know I smoke, we often smoke together. But when it comes to calibrating with machines, I'm always not allowed, so I can only make non coffee and take coffee from the calibration results of my male friends. I don't know why, maybe it's just not allowed yet. But I've felt hurt, why I'm not trusted when I can do it. Just like Jeng Yah, she also felt the same way and even from childhood she lived from tobacco, imagine how strong her knowledge about tobacco is. In my opinion, this is the result of our habits that have been passed down from the patriarchy. Maybe not 'lose', but inferior. Because in the eyes of men, women are incapable, they will always ask for help. It's true, I don't deny that, but the behavior of not giving opportunities is very evil to me. The mindset of men is that women must obey. That's what's difficult, if a man already has that mindset, his arrogance is extraordinary. So I think it's really sad if I were Jeng Yah, I'm not as great as Jeng Yah to dare to act something to break the wall." (Informant 2, May 10, 2024)

"Jeng Yah in this series for me illustrates that women at that time were not given the freedom to do activities that could be done by men. Her actions in mixing sauces and at that time only men did made it clear that women were still considered taboo if they could do tasks or jobs that were usually dominated by men." (Informant 3, May 19, 2024)

"In my opinion, one of the factors of equality between men and women has not been successful enough even though it has been depicted through the character Jeng Yah who has been lent masculinity, but it is still overshadowed by patriarchy indirectly, especially from the characters of Raja, Seno, and the situation of the society that existed at that time." (Informant 4, May 29, 2024)

"I feel sorry for her, I also included the character of Jeng Yah, even though her fate was unlucky or not good, but she was cool to be able to rise little by little even though she ended up dying because of illness, very sad." (Informant 5, June 11, 2024)

"Smoking and working in the past seemed to be for men. But for the smoking itself, I think I have a different view, because kretek at that time was not for oral satisfaction like it is now, didn't it used to include medicine? Although in its development, those who used kretek were generally men, so it was labeled as one of the characteristics of masculinity. The independence that Jeng Yah fought for was not limited to her being able to work as a man or that she could smoke freely like them, but rather that her opinions and hard work were not constrained by other people's opinions just because she was a woman. She wants to be independent as a woman, with her female identity, not with the assumption that she wants to take on the role of a man. In the series itself, she was initially underestimated for making the kretek sauce, right? Even though she ran the factory, she came with the image of Idroes Moeria's daughter, not the image of a talented woman. Taking care of the factory, smoking, and making her own kretek, developing the business doesn't have to make her discard herself as a woman who wants to marry someone with the same vision, have children, and live a happy life as other women want. Lastly, I want to say... in the end, Jeng Yah as a woman wants her dreams and love to be balanced. Not missing one or the other, as if women have to choose between career and family. Where I find this very sad, because in the end the storyline ends in one of them." (Informant 6, June 12, 2024)

In the answers that have been collected, it can be seen that all informants have their own opinions about the main character of this story. Informants 1 to 6 fall into the negotiation position, because they accept the messages that have been conveyed by the media, but they also have their own views on this matter, so they do not fully accept all the messages they get.

4. Audience Reception of the Intermediality

Researchers have also obtained the opinions of viewers who have and have not read the novel. Their explanations can provide information on whether after watching the series, they are interested in the original work. So it can be determined whether the two media influence each other.

Werner Wolf emphasised that media borders are created by conventions and defined intermediality as a relation 'between conventionally distinct media of expression or communication: this relation consists in a verifiable, or at least convincingly identifiable, direct or indirect participation of two or more media in the signification of a human artefact' (Elleström, 2021)

Intramediality concerns all types of relations among similar media types, and intermediality involves all types of relations among dissimilar media types. However, considering that there are (at least) two kinds of media borders, there are (at least) two ways of understanding media interrelations, making the classes intramediality and intermediality broader or narrower (Elleström, 2021)

"Honestly, for me personally it's a bit annoying. After watching and continuing to the book, there must be an argument about "why is this like this?" or "why is that person like this?". But yes, changes in details like that can sometimes explain something that might only be discussed briefly in the next medium, making the story universe wider." (Informant 1, April 21, 2024)

"I found out about the novel Gadis Kretek after I watched the series. After that, I searched for information about the contents of the novel Gadis Kretek on the 'X' application (formerly Twitter) and there were some parts that were not included in the series. That's what made me interested in owning the novel Gadis Kretek." (Informant 3, May 19, 2024)

"No hehe, because I'm not in the mood to read and I'm the type who would rather watch than read." (Informant 5, June 11, 2024)

From the explanations of the three informants who first watched the series, there are several opinions, which show that the two media influence each other. From Informant 1, who had previously watched the series and then read the novel, she argued that the adaptation work impressed her much

more than the story in the novel. This shows that the experience gained from the first work will affect the judgment of the work before or after, which uses a different vehicle. Informant 2 also said that after finishing the series, she was interested in finding out about the previous work. However, unlike Informant 3, she is more inclined towards audio-visual works than literary works, so she is quite satisfied with what she gets in one of these works.

4. Conclusion

In this study, it can be concluded that this research aims to find out how the audience's reception of the intermediality of the novel and the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek*. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative using Stuart Hall's reception theory.

Based on the results of the analysis that the researchers have conducted on the audience's reception of the intermediality of *Gadis Kretek*, it can be concluded that the changes that occur in the *Gadis Kretek* series can disrupt the viewing experience of someone who has first read the source work. Vice versa, a viewer who then reads the book will wonder because the experience they have previously had turns out to be very different from the other work, even though both are still from the same world. That's because the medium used is different, so the experience will also be different.

The two media also influence each other, because readers will tend to watch the adaptation, although there may be a feeling of annoyance because what they watch cannot fulfill their expectations like when they read it. Viewers themselves will also mostly be interested in finding out about the source work, in this case the novel. Researchers realize that the research that has been done is far from perfect. Suggestions for future research, it is hoped that it can further explore audience opinions and data obtained and be more specific to the research topic to be studied. In addition, it is also hoped that further research can increase literature studies related to the research topics to be studied.

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