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Female Body as a Commodity: A Critical Discourse Analysis in Toer's *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of women's bodies as discursive commodities in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas* using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Employing a qualitative design, it treats language as a social practice embedded in power relations and patriarchal ideology. The data consist of ten textual units, presented as nine analytical excerpts, selected through critical reading and purposive sampling and analyzed with Fairclough's three-dimensional framework: textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis. The findings show that women's bodies are predominantly represented as visual and symbolic objects whose value is determined by male desire, religious-social status, and marriage norms. Lexical choices, participant roles, and a narrative perspective aligned with male characters normalize the commodification and subordination of women, while the text also grants Midah moments of resistance and interiority. The novel thus exposes the suffering of women within a patriarchal system while simultaneously reproducing patriarchal discourse through objectifying representations. The study concludes that literary discourse plays an ambivalent role, functioning both as a medium of social critique and as a site for the reproduction of gender inequality.

Keywords: commodification, critical discourse analysis, patriarchy, representation, women

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Introduction

From the perspective of objectification theory, women are reduced to "instruments" available for visual inspection, evaluation, and the pleasure of others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Research on social roles likewise shows that women are routinely stereotyped as emotional, submissive, and easily influenced, especially by men (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In Indonesia, social constructs commonly center women's beauty standards on physical appearance, which positions women as subordinate to men and as objects open to unfair treatment. Bordo (1995) traces the construction of the meaning of the body from the seventeenth century and shows that the body is bound up with politics, a condition she describes as "the politics of the body" (p. 21). Within this politics, the ideal woman is beautiful, fair, and thin so that she can later attract men (p. 47). Beauty standards framed by media and culture likewise limit women's courage to express themselves (Putri, 2025).

The process of transforming women into commodities is known as commodification. A woman becomes a commodity when she is turned into a unit under the control of others (Kopytoff, 1986). Commodifying a person, in other words, attaches exchange value to someone who should not be commercialized, so that she can be sold, exchanged, or used. Moore (2008) offers a factual example of how women can be treated as commodities: a woman may be regarded as the property of her husband and his family, even after his death. Such treatment occurs in real social environments, both consciously and unconsciously, and it also appears in literary works, which are a form of authorial representation. Several authors have published novels on women's issues such as feminism, gender bias, and the commodification of women, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer is among the most prominent. Among his many novels about women is *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas*.

This novel was chosen for three reasons. First, Toer is a canonical figure in Indonesian literature whose novels are frequently read as social critique. Second, *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas* places a female protagonist's body at the center of the narrative, where it is repeatedly named, evaluated, and exchanged by other characters, which makes it a rich site for examining commodification. Third, the feminist themes of this work have received little scholarly

attention, whereas most research on Toer's representations of women has concentrated on *Bumi Manusia* and *Gadis Pantai*.

Fairclough (2013) emphasizes that discourse is a social practice formed through a dialectical relationship between text, discursive practice, and social practice. Language therefore functions both as a means of communication and as a means of revealing ideologies, including the patriarchal ideology that marginalizes women. The commodification of women has attracted sustained scholarly attention. Lestari, et al. (2025), in a study of TikTok marketing content, found that women occupy the symbolic power space of business actors in the entertainment and digital media industries. Women's bodies become symbols of beauty controlled by patriarchal ideology, which makes it easier for capitalists to exploit them as objects in marketing strategies, and women are placed in a subordinate position that is reflected in value systems, education, and culture that justify unequal power relations. Indriani (2023) analyzed Ratih Kumala's novel *Gadis Kretek* with Fairclough's framework and showed how women's bodies are reduced to a trinity of Girl, Wife, and Entertainer and used as a sales promotion strategy, with the female body operating as a "desire production machine." Other studies have examined the commodification or objectification of women in online gambling advertisements on Instagram (Prasetyo & Kristiyono, 2024), in the capitalization and industrialization of women's bodies (Zahid et al., 2023), in short stories (Rahmawati, 2022), in film (Ramadhani & Adiprabowo, 2023), and in university settings (Barbosa et al., 2020).

Studies of the primary text itself are scarcer. Desy and Sri (2021) conducted a descriptive qualitative study that mapped the character traits of the fourteen figures in the novel, concluding that the protagonist Midah is resilient, independent, yet stubborn. Their character-based analysis offers an essential baseline for understanding the narrative's key agents, but it operates within a traditional literary paradigm that treats characters primarily as individual, concrete "persons." The present study addresses this gap by shifting the analytical lens from descriptive characterization to critical, multi-dimensional discourse analysis. By employing Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, it demonstrates that Midah's character traits and narrative trajectory are not merely expressions of personal identity but are discursively constructed and socially conditioned.

The need to focus on *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas* becomes clearer when the study is situated within existing CDA scholarship on Toer's gendered representations. Pranasa (2023) employs Fairclough's framework to deconstruct the figure of the "Nyai" in *Bumi Manusia*, showing how power, class, and colonial-patriarchal subjection are negotiated through Nyai Ontosoroh. Firawati et al. (2023) use Fairclough's three-dimensional model to investigate *Gadis Pantai*, revealing how lexical markers such as "*cuma perempuan*" and "*istri percobaan*" linguistically codify female inferiority while tracing the protagonist's subsequent verbal resistance. Both studies provide valuable frameworks for understanding Toer's critique of female subjugation within feudal and colonial systems, yet their primary texts center on protagonists who mount overt, politicized resistance against their oppressors. *Midah*, in contrast, captures a distinct urban socio-economic transition in which the protagonist's commodification is mediated through the aesthetics of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) and commercial entertainment. By focusing on *Midah*, this study extends Toer scholarship into a comparatively neglected domain and shows how patriarchal domination operates when a woman's body is treated not merely as feudal property but as a commercialized asset in a modernizing marketplace.

CDA provides a strong framework for exploring power relations in language because the representation of women in a text cannot be understood through linguistics alone; it must be linked to a broader social context. CDA allows researchers to reveal how gender inequality is subtly sustained through language practices. *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas* portrays a woman living under the pressures of a patriarchal social and economic structure that positions women's bodies and existence as objects of consumption. Midah is represented as a marginalized woman with little control over her own life, gradually drawn into a system that commodifies her. This representation is not merely individual; it reflects a wider social problem in which women are positioned as commodities in economic, cultural, and social spheres. Toer not only recounts Midah's suffering but also offers a critique of the system that enables it, which leaves room for research that examines both the critique and its limits.

Through the textual dimension, this study analyzes how language and narrative choices construct images of women; through the dimension of discursive practice, it examines

how texts are produced and consumed within a specific ideological context; and through the dimension of social practice, it uncovers the power relations and social structures that perpetuate women's subordination. The study is guided by one research question: How does the discourse of *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas* represent and normalize the commodification of the female body across Fairclough's textual, discursive practice, and social practice dimensions? In answering it, the study also reflects on how literature can dismantle, or even reproduce, gender inequality in society.

Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design (Rusandi & Rusli, 2021) grounded in Norman Fairclough's CDA, which conceptualizes language as a social practice dialectically related to power relations, ideology, and social structures (Fairclough, 2013; Munfarida, 2014; Silaswati, 2019). CDA is appropriate for this study because it enables the analysis of how discourse contributes to the construction, maintenance, and legitimation of social inequality, including gender-based domination. Fairclough's framework holds that texts are not neutral representations of reality but ideological products shaped by, and shaping, social practices (Fairclough, 2013).

The object of the research is the discourse of women's commodification in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas*. A single-novel case study is justified on three grounds: Toer's canonical status in Indonesian literature; the novel's sustained focus on a female protagonist whose body is repeatedly appraised, named, and exchanged by other characters; and the comparative neglect of this text in existing CDA scholarship on Toer (see Introduction). The novel therefore constitutes an appropriate and information-rich case for the research question, although it does not support claims about Toer's work as a whole. The data are linguistic units, namely words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and dialogues, that represent the female body, objectification, and gender-based power relations. These units are treated as discursive elements through which patriarchal ideology is articulated and normalized in literary discourse.

Data were collected through critical and repeated reading of the novel. The reading began by identifying textual segments that represent the female body, gender relations, and power asymmetries. Segments were then selected through purposive sampling, focusing on those that explicitly or implicitly indicate commodification practices, a strategy consistent with qualitative discourse research, which prioritizes analytical relevance over numerical representativeness (Creswell, 2014). The sampling yielded ten textual units, which are presented as nine analytical excerpts because Excerpt 4 combines two adjacent units (pp. 30–31). All excerpts come from the early-to-middle segments of the novel (pp. 9–50). Sufficiency was judged by thematic saturation: repeated critical readings produced no further linguistic patterns, discursive categories, or forms of commodification beyond those represented in the ten units. Because the units are drawn from these segments, the claims of this study concern the discourse of the segments analyzed (see Limitations in the Conclusion).

Each unit was recorded in a coding sheet with the following fields: page number, speaker or focalizing character, lexical choices, the grammatical role of the female character (agent, goal, or bearer of an attribute), figurative devices, and the CDA dimension to which the unit contributed most. All ten units were examined at the textual level. Units bearing on narrative perspective and gaze (Excerpts 4, 8, and 9) also informed the analysis of discursive practice, and units bearing on marriage, naming, and religious-social status (Excerpts 2, 3, 6, and 7) also informed the analysis of social practice.

Analysis followed Fairclough's three-dimensional model. Textual analysis examined lexical choices, grammatical structures (in particular, who occupies the subject and object positions in a clause and what kind of process the clause expresses), metaphor, nominalization, and narrative perspective (Fairclough, 2013). Discursive practice analysis examined the processes of text production and consumption, including the narrator's role, focalization, and the interpretive position the text offers to readers. Social practice analysis interpreted the relationship between discourse and broader socio-cultural structures, particularly the patriarchal ideology and value systems that sustain the subordination and commodification of women (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Validity was strengthened through theoretical triangulation. The CDA findings were related to Bordo's (1995; see also Hekman, 1995) feminist account of body politics, Fredrickson and Roberts's (1997) objectification theory, Kopytoff's (1986) account of commoditization, Mulvey's (1975) concept of the male gaze, and Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality. This triangulation strengthens analytical rigor and limits researcher subjectivity by situating textual interpretations within established critical traditions (Denzin, 2012).

Result and Discussion

Textual Analysis

At the textual level, the female body in *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas* is constructed through lexical choices and grammatical structures that consistently foreground the physical attributes and sexual attractiveness of female characters. So that each claim can be traced to its linguistic evidence, every excerpt below is presented with its original Indonesian text, an English gloss, and an interpretation of its specific linguistic features. The glosses are the author's own translations.

Excerpt 1

"Midah begitu manis dan montok dan tujuh atau delapan tahun lagi dia akan menguasai seluruh hati-muda di seluas daerah Cibatok" (hal. 9)

Gloss: "Midah is so sweet and plump, and in seven or eight years she will capture the hearts of all the young men throughout the Cibatok area" (p. 9).

Interpretation: The first clause is a relational process in which Midah is the Carrier and *manis* (sweet) and *montok* (plump) are the Attributes. No action is assigned to her; she is defined by evaluable bodily qualities, and the adjectives are the objectifying diction of physical appraisal. The second clause seems to offer a counterweight, because Midah becomes the Actor of a material process, *menguasai* (to rule, to capture). Yet the Goal of that process is *hati-muda* (young hearts), and the projection into the future (*tujuh atau delapan tahun lagi*) turns her power into a forecast of her appeal to male desire. Her agency is apparent rather than real: it

is conferred by, and measured in, her capacity to attract. Rather than positioning Midah as a unified, active subject, the sentence estimates in advance the future value of her body.

Excerpt 2

"Jangan kira engkau tidak cantik. Sudah banyak bapakmu menerima lamaran. Tapi bapakmu hanya mau menerima lamaran kalau ada hadji dari Cibatok yang mengerjakannya" (hal. 20)

Gloss: "Do not think you are not beautiful. Your father has already received many proposals. But your father only wants to accept a proposal if there is a Hadji from Cibatok who makes it" (p. 20).

Interpretation: The unequal power relationship here is structured through participant roles. In the first sentence Midah is only the addressee of a reassurance (*Jangan kira engkau tidak cantik*), which ties her self-assessment to her beauty. In the following sentences the father is the Actor (*bapakmu menerima lamaran*, "your father receives proposals"), and it is the proposal, not Midah, that is received. Marriage is thereby presented as a transaction between men. The condition *kalau ada hadji dari Cibatok yang mengerjakannya* introduces a second male authority whose religious title sets the terms of acceptance. A woman's physical beauty is tied directly to a socio-economic exchange in which her father and the hadji are the active deciders.

Excerpt 3

"Dengan senyummu itu runtuhlah iman lelaki yang melihatmu"

Gloss: "With that smile of yours, the faith of any man who sees you will crumble."

Interpretation: This segment builds a hyperbolic metaphor in which a female smile causes the collapse of men's faith. Grammatically, *iman lelaki* (men's faith) is the subject of the process *runtuh* (to crumble), while Midah's smile appears only as an instrumental adjunct (*dengan senyummu itu*, "with that smile of yours"): her expression is the instrument, and men are the ones affected. The religious lexeme *iman* frames her body in moral-religious terms, as a source of temptation and moral threat. By representing women as destabilizing forces, the text shifts the moral accountability of desire from the male observer to the female object, which reinforces patriarchal ideology.

Excerpt 4

"Min, yang juga kurus seperti tubuhnya it tak lepas – lepas memandanginya. Sekali ia tersenyum, dan senyum itu disambut oleh Min dengan wajah merah membara" (hal. 30–31)

"Akhirnya keduanya berpandangan begitu lama, sehingga pemuda Min lupa pada makanan yang ada di depannya" (hal. 31)

Gloss: "Min, who was as thin as his body, did not take his eyes off her. Once she smiled, and that smile was greeted by Min with a face burning red" (pp. 30–31). "Finally they stared at each other for so long that young Min forgot the food in front of him" (p. 31).

Interpretation: The sentence structures establish a clear visual hierarchy. Min is the grammatical subject of the perception clause (*tak lepas-lepas memandanginya*, "did not take his eyes off her"), and Midah appears only as the Phenomenon, reduced to the pronoun suffix *-nya* attached to the verb. Her smile is reported from the outside, whereas Min's bodily reaction (*wajah merah membara*, "face burning red") and his distraction (*lupa pada makanan*) are narrated in detail. The male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) thus operates as a structure of narration: even the mutual stare (*berpandangan begitu lama*) is described through its effect on Min. The woman's presence becomes a spectacle that disrupts male activity. This excerpt records the desiring gaze of a young man toward Midah, which prepares the ground for the more instrumental evaluations in the excerpts that follow.

Excerpt 5

"Suaramu begitu bagus. Setelah menunjuk perempuan setengah tua bergigi emas, ia meneruskan" (hal. 32)

Gloss: "Your voice is so beautiful. After pointing to a middle-aged woman with golden teeth, he continued" (p. 32).

Interpretation: Midah's vocal talent and another woman's body are evaluated side by side. The compliment *Suaramu begitu bagus* is an attributive clause that evaluates something Midah possesses, her voice, not Midah as a person. It is followed at once by the speaker pointing at *perempuan setengah tua bergigi emas* (a middle-aged woman with golden teeth), who is identified only by a bodily feature. The speaker (*ia*) is the Actor of both pointing and continuing, while the women are the objects pointed at and compared. Midah's voice and the other woman's teeth appear as fragmented attributes to be appraised, so that artistic

performance is processed in the same register as bodily display and not as an expression of subjective identity.

Excerpt 6

"Dan karena engkau begini manis-memang cocok pantun Min tadi. Engkau memang manis. Jadi kami sebut saja Simanis" (hal. 35)

Gloss: "And because you are so sweet—indeed Min's verse earlier was fitting. You are indeed sweet. So, we will just call you *Simanis* (The Sweet One)" (p. 35).

Interpretation: This excerpt demonstrates a critical discursive shift through nominalization. The adjective *manis* (sweet) is converted into the name *Simanis* by the prefix *Si-*, so a single bodily quality becomes an identity and the individual name *Midah* is displaced. The act of naming is performed by a collective male subject (*kami sebut saja*, "we simply call"), whose authority is presented as casual through the particle *saja* ("simply"). The justification is itself an evaluation (*karena engkau begini manis*), and it draws on Min's *pantun*, a traditional verse form, so that a poetic praise of beauty becomes the ground for renaming. The male characters linguistically institutionalize her objectification and strip her of personal agency.

Excerpt 7

"ya, engkau tidur dengan kami, dengan aku, Mimin kurus menguatkan ucapan keinginannya. Tak pernah aku melihat perempuan semanis engkau" (hal. 37)

Gloss: "Yes, you sleep with us, with me, thin Mimin strengthened the expression of his desire. Never have I seen a woman as sweet as you" (p. 37).

Interpretation: The dialogue depicts the physical commodification of Midah's body explicitly. Midah is the grammatical subject of *engkau tidur dengan kami* ("you sleep with us"), but the clause is not her action: the narration frames it as the speaker's desire (*menguatkan ucapan keinginannya*, "strengthened the expression of his desire"), and it has the force of a directive in which she is the addressee and the men (*dengan kami, dengan aku*) are the beneficiaries. The second sentence positions the speaker as a connoisseur, the Senser who has looked at many women (*Tak pernah aku melihat*), and Midah as an instance in a ranked category (*perempuan semanis engkau*). The male characters' language treats her body as an accessible commodity of consumption and disregards her status as a self-determining human subject.

Excerpt 8

"Tangan kepala rombongan yang merangkul dadanya terasa hangat" (hal. 48)

Gloss: "The hand of the troop leader embracing her chest felt warm" (p. 48).

Interpretation: The grammatical subject of the clause is not a person but a body part, *tangan kepala rombongan* (the troop leader's hand), which is the Actor of *merangkul* (to embrace), with *dadanya* (her chest) as the Goal. This metonymy, together with the sensory predicate *terasa hangat* ("felt warm"), renders a physical intrusion as a sensation and not as an act of a responsible agent. The lexical choices and the narrative symbols normalize the consumption of her body: Midah is represented without basic physical autonomy, and nothing in the clause marks consent. The excerpt illustrates her vulnerability within gender-based power asymmetries.

Excerpt 9

"Datang bidan lagi, memandanginya lama – lama, kemudian: Memang manis. Patut tak tahu lakinya" (hal. 50)

Gloss: "Another midwife came, staring at her for a long time, then: She is indeed sweet. No wonder her husband doesn't know" (p. 50).

Interpretation: The evaluator in this excerpt is a woman. The midwife (*bidan*) repeats the gaze structure of Excerpt 4 (*memandanginya lama-lama*), but the social relationship differs. Min's look expressed the desire of a young man; the midwife's look is the appraisal of a female figure with social standing, delivered in a context that concerns Midah's marital situation (*lakinya*, "her man"). Her verdict *Memang manis* repeats the adjective that has followed Midah since Excerpt 1, and the concluding clause treats her sweetness as an explanation for her circumstances. That a woman reproduces the evaluative code shows that the objectifying vocabulary has been naturalized: the reduction of women to visual commodities has moved beyond individual male desire and become a generalized social practice.

Taken together, the nine excerpts show three recurring patterns. The first is lexical: the evaluative adjective *manis* and its derivatives recur in Excerpts 1, 6, 7, and 9, supplemented by *montok* and *cantik*, so that the female body is described almost exclusively through qualities judged by others. The second concerns participant roles: men and male-dominated

groups (the father, the hadji, Min, the troop leader, and the collective *kami*) occupy the positions of Actor, Senser, and Namer, whereas Midah occupies the positions of Carrier, Phenomenon, Goal, or addressee. None of the nine excerpts reports Midah's own words. The third is figurative and religious language that frames her body either as a moral threat (Excerpt 3) or as an accessible commodity (Excerpts 7 and 8). In Fairclough's (2013) terms, such repeated choices naturalize particular social relations through language and make them appear to be common sense.

A rigorous reading must also account for a counter-interpretation: Midah is not merely a passive, silent object of absolute commodification. The novel works as a dual site of representation in which she negotiates, resists, and contests the structures that limit her. When her father treats her beauty as a transactional asset by accepting marriage proposals on her behalf, Midah does not submit, and her subsequent flight from the household is an act of rebellion against patriarchal commodification. Even as she is drawn into a system that commodifies her in the urban sphere, her decision to become a professional *kroncong* singer exposes her to the visual evaluation of a public audience yet also serves as a self-directed strategy for economic survival and artistic expression. Through these moments of self-determination and the text's occasional attention to her psychological suffering, the narrative grants Midah an undercurrent of interiority that resists complete reduction to an "instrument" of male pleasure. The ambivalence of the novel, then, does not come from a simple failure to criticize patriarchy; it comes from the unresolved tension between Midah's struggle for agency and the rigid socio-economic structures that seek to commodify her.

The power exercised over Midah is also not only a matter of gender. The men who control her are repeatedly marked by the honorific *hadji*: the proposals her father will accept are those brought by a *hadji dari Cibatok* (Excerpt 2), and the figures who dominate her life, Hadji Abdul and Hadji Terbus, carry the same title. The title condenses religious authority and social standing, since the pilgrimage it denotes also presupposes considerable means. In Excerpt 2 it becomes the currency of the transaction: a proposal gains acceptability from the proposer's religious-social rank, so that Midah's beauty is exchanged within a hierarchy of men. Excerpt 3 adds the vocabulary of faith (*iman*), through which female attractiveness is

cast as a danger to male piety. Gender, religious authority, and class status therefore operate together (Crenshaw, 1989): religious discourse supplies the moral justification, and social standing supplies the power to arrange her future. A reading that sees only men against women would miss how the prestige of particular men lends legitimacy to her commodification.

These patterns raise a question that the text alone cannot answer: who directs the observation, and how are readers brought to accept it? The next section turns to the narrator's perspective and to the interpretive position that the novel offers its readers.

Discursive Practice

The textual patterns identified above, in which women are Carriers, Goals, and Phenomena while men act, perceive, and name, are not only features of individual sentences; they depend on a narrative perspective that makes them seem natural. Fairclough (2013) holds that discursive practice concerns how texts are produced by authors and how meaning is directed to readers. This section therefore asks how the narrator's perspective transforms the textual pattern into an interpretive frame that is imposed on the reader.

The novel was written in the social context of 1950s Indonesia, when patriarchal discourse still dominated, by a male author who placed a woman at the center of the story. The narration is heterodiegetic: a third-person narrator reports events from outside the characters. Within the selected units, however, the visual perspective is not neutral. In Excerpt 4 the narrator reports Min's gaze and bodily reaction in detail but offers no comparable report of Midah's response to being looked at. In Excerpt 8 the physical contact is narrated as a sensation and not as an act with a responsible agent. In Excerpts 6 and 7 the men's speech is quoted at length, while Midah's is not reported at all. The result is a pattern of focalization aligned with male characters, even though the narrator is not itself a character. The narrator thereby functions as an ideological mediator, implicitly guiding readers to accept the objectification of women's bodies as normal.

In the process of consumption, readers who follow this narration are invited to share the male characters' viewpoint. The repeated structure in which a man looks and a woman is looked at (Excerpts 4 and 9) and the recurring adjective *manis* work as what Fairclough (2013)

calls ideological positioning: the text directs readers toward a particular interpretation without announcing it. Excerpt 9 shows the mechanism at work inside the story world, because a female character adopts the same evaluative vocabulary and so presents the gaze as common sense. Interdiscursivity reinforces the effect. Marriage negotiation (Excerpt 2), religious language (Excerpt 3), verse in praise of beauty (Excerpt 6), and the idiom of the entertainment troupe (Excerpts 5 and 8) are combined in one evaluative register, and each lends the others plausibility. Consumption is analyzed here as a reading position inscribed in the text; the documented reception of actual readers lies outside the data of this study.

The textual patterns are thus carried into an interpretive frame for the reader, even though the same narration records Midah's suffering. Whether this combination criticizes or reproduces the order it depicts depends on the social structures that give these discourses their meaning, which the next section examines.

Social Practice

Having shown how the narration aligns readers with male perspectives, this section asks which social structures make that alignment intelligible. According to Fairclough (2013), social practice is the level at which discourse interacts with broader social structures such as value systems, cultural norms, and political-economic relations.

Marriage is the clearest of these structures in the data. In Excerpt 2 a daughter's marriage is negotiated between men, and the conditions under which a proposal is accepted rest with the father. Beauty is the asset around which the exchange turns, so the female body is constructed as a social asset whose value is determined by beauty and sexual attractiveness, and this value legitimizes the treatment of women in social relations. The arrangement resembles what Moore (2008) describes as a woman being treated as the property of her husband and his family, and what Kopytoff (1986) describes as the placing of a person under the control of others. Economic dependency is the second structure. Once Midah leaves her father's household and works as a *kroncong* singer, her livelihood depends on audiences and troupe leaders whose gaze and touch (Excerpts 5 and 8) set the terms of her work. Her movement between the roles of daughter and entertainer, with marriage and sexual relations as the recurring terms of evaluation (Excerpts 2, 7, and 9), parallels the Girl–Wife–Entertainer

trinity that Indriani (2023) identifies in a different text. Religious-social status is the third structure: as Excerpts 2 and 3 show, the transaction is legitimized by the authority of the hadji, and the discourse of faith casts female attractiveness as a danger that women must answer for.

The analysis at this level rests on what the novel itself represents about marriage, work, and status. It does not draw on external documentation of marriage customs, bride-price practices, or women's legal and economic position in the 1950s, which would be a valuable extension of the present study (see Limitations in the Conclusion).

It is at this level that the ambivalence of the novel can be stated in full. On the one hand, the narrative exposes the suffering that follows when a woman is treated as an asset: Midah's flight and her moments of interiority present a subject who contests the structures that commodify her. On the other hand, the same narration relies on the vocabulary of those structures, namely the evaluative adjective *manis*, the male gaze as organizing perspective, and marriage as exchange, to make its story intelligible, and it therefore reproduces what it criticizes. Fairclough (2013) observes that critical discourse is often contradictory because it is produced within the same ideological system it seeks to challenge. Literature accordingly plays a dual role: it is a space for social criticism and also a medium that reproduces the patriarchal ideology that normalizes the commodification of women's bodies.

Synthesis: From Text to Social Practice

The three levels of analysis build a single argument. At the textual level, objectifying lexis and participant roles reduce Midah to a bearer of attributes and a Goal of male action, while men act, perceive, and name. At the level of discursive practice, the narrator's alignment with male focalizers turns these patterns into a perspective that readers are invited to share. At the level of social practice, this perspective draws its intelligibility from, and helps to sustain, the institutions of marriage, economic dependency, and religious-social hierarchy that regulate women's bodies. Each level depends on the one before it: the textual patterns would remain isolated stylistic features without the narrative perspective that organizes them, and that perspective would seem arbitrary without the social structures that make it common sense. The ambivalence of the novel is cumulative in this sense. The text records the suffering

of a commodified woman, yet its language, perspective, and plot conventions rely on the same codes that commodify her.

Relating the Findings to Previous Studies

The findings converge with, diverge from, and extend the studies that motivated this research. They converge with Indriani (2023) in showing that a narrative can depict a woman's struggle and still present her body as an object of male-oriented visual desire. Indriani describes the female body in *Gadis Kretek* as a "desire production machine" that attracts buyers, and Midah's body is likewise appraised as a source of attraction for male observers (Excerpts 1, 4, and 7). Midah's trajectory also maps onto Indriani's Girl–Wife–Entertainer trinity, in which women have identities of their own but are still presented as complements to men: Midah is appraised as a daughter, evaluated in relation to marriage and sexual relations, and displayed as a singer. The findings converge as well with Lestari, et al. et al. (2025), who show that women's bodies become symbols of beauty controlled by patriarchal ideology and that subordination is justified through value systems and culture. Excerpts 2 and 3 show an earlier, family-based and religiously inflected version of the same justification.

The divergence lies in the mechanism of commodification. In both earlier studies the body is mobilized for marketing, as cigarette promotion in Indriani's novel and as platform content in Lestari, et al. et al., so commodification is tied to advertising and the market. In *Midah*, commodification operates through family, marriage, naming, and religious-social status, before and alongside the entertainment market, and it is carried by everyday evaluative language and not by promotional discourse.

The study extends this work in two ways. It shows that the logic described by Lestari, et al. et al. and Indriani in contemporary media was already inscribed in the language of mid-twentieth-century Indonesian literature, and it shows that Fairclough's three dimensions can trace how a canonical literary text criticizes and reproduces commodification at once. It also complements the character-based reading of Desy and Sri (2021): the resilience and independence they attribute to Midah appear here as agency that is constantly negotiated against discursive constraints, which is why the counter-reading above matters.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the representation of women in *Midah, Simanis Bergigi Emas* is embedded in discursive practices that commodify the female body and reinforce patriarchal ideology. Through Fairclough's CDA, it is evident that language in the novel functions not merely as a narrative tool but as a social practice that constructs women as objects of visual pleasure, symbolic exchange, and social control. At the textual level, lexical choices and participant roles consistently position women as passive objects, while men occupy active and dominant roles. At the level of discursive practice, the narrator's alignment with male focalizers guides readers toward accepting objectification as a normalized social reality. At the level of social practice, these representations reflect and reproduce patriarchal structures of marriage, economic dependency, and religious-social hierarchy that regulate women's bodies and limit their autonomy. The critique of patriarchy in the novel is therefore ambivalent. While the novel exposes the injustice and suffering experienced by women, and grants Midah moments of resistance, it simultaneously reproduces patriarchal discourse through language and narrative strategies that center male perspectives. This ambivalence highlights the complex role of literature as both a space of resistance and a site of ideological reproduction, and it underscores the value of CDA for uncovering hidden power relations in literary texts and for discussions of gender, ideology, and representation in Indonesian literature.

Several limitations qualify these findings. The study analyzes ten units from pp. 9–50 of a single novel. It therefore cannot establish how the novel resolves Midah's commodification, or whether its ending challenges, reverses, or reinforces the patterns identified here; the claim of ambivalence rests on the segments analyzed and, on the narrative, events discussed in the counter-reading. The analysis of discursive practice treats production and consumption through the text's narrative perspective and does not draw on publication history, authorial statements, or documented reader reception, and the analysis of social practice relies on the world represented in the novel and not on historical documentation of marriage customs and women's legal and economic status in the period. Future research could analyze the whole novel, including its ending; draw on archival and reception evidence; compare *Midah* with *Gadis Pantai* and *Bumi Manusia* to map the development of Toer's gender critique; and examine

narratives of female agency and resistance to commodification as well as the responses of contemporary readers to these mid-century representations.

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