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Dramatic Truths: The Symbology of the Reformation in Performance History

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SUBMISSION TRACK

Received: February 06, 2026
 Final Revision: August 09, 2026
 Accepted: August 12, 2026
 Available Online: August 17, 2026

KEYWORDS

Dramatic truths, the symbology, performance history, symbolic expression

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how *Tiga Drama*, a theatrical work by Seno Gumira Ajidarma, represents historical reality through Peirce's semiotic framework. It identifies and interprets the ways in which objective and imaginative realities are constructed through icons, indices, and symbols. Employing a qualitative descriptive, this study analyzes verbal and nonverbal signs found in the dramatic text, including dialogue, stage directions, characterization, dramatic situations, settings, and symbolic expressions associated with historical and sociopolitical representation. Data were collected through documentation, with the play script serving as the primary source and relevant books and journal articles as secondary sources. The identified signs were coded and classified according to Peirce's categories of icon, index, and symbol, and were subsequently interpreted through qualitative semiotic analysis. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), comprising data reduction, data display, interpretation of sign-object-interpretant relationships, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that objective reality is represented through concrete elements, such as television, the *kebaya*, and *ludruk*, whereas imaginative reality is conveyed through symbolic and emotional elements, including robot uniforms and red lighting. These findings demonstrate that the drama integrates factual and metaphorical dimensions to reconstruct collective trauma, resistance, and hope associated with the 1998 Reform era. The study contributes to the development of Indonesian literary semiotics and highlights the practical potential of drama as a medium for historical and social reflection. Nevertheless, the analysis is limited to textual aspects and does not examine performative elements. Future research should employ multimodal semiotic or comparative approaches to develop a broader understanding of historical representation in Indonesian drama.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia possesses a rich culture reflected in various literary works, including drama. As a medium of social expression, drama not only entertains but also reflects social, political, and historical realities. Literary works serve as cultural representations that reflect social dynamics, preserve historical memory, and provide a medium for interpreting social and political transformations (Al-Gailany et al., 2025; Agustin et al., 2025; Andersen et al., 2024; Handoko et al., 2024;

Suraya, 2022). In addition, literary works can also serve as a record of historical events, such as demonstrated by the work of Seno Gumira Ajidarma in *Tiga Drama*. This play depicts the socio-political conditions in Indonesia during the 1998 Reform era, a crucial transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic period (Auliah & Purwanto, 2025; Mukhlis et al., 2025). Drama can vividly depict socio-political tensions through its dialogue and plot while providing space for voices often marginalized in official

historical accounts. Therefore, drama is not merely entertainment but also a vehicle for social critique and collective reflection. As a social text, drama transforms historical experiences into aesthetic representations, enabling readers to critically interpret socio-political realities (Albanjari, 2025; Kusuma, 2018; Rodiah, 2020).

Tiga Drama by Seno Gumira Ajidarma depicts the social upheavals following the Reform era, ranging from collective trauma and shifts in power to the search for a new identity, making them relevant for analysis as a reinterpretation of history and social critique. Unlike Seno Gumira Ajidarma's other well-known works, such as *Jazz*, *Parfum*, and *Insiden*, which primarily present socio-political criticism through fragmented narratives and short fiction, *Tiga Drama* offers a dramatic form in which dialogue, stage directions, character interactions, and theatrical symbolism function simultaneously as interconnected semiotic signs. This distinctive, dramatic structure provides a richer and more systematic representation of historical reality, enabling the analysis of verbal and nonverbal signs within a single narrative framework. Consequently, *Tiga Drama* constitutes a particularly suitable corpus for applying Peirce's semiotic model because it allows icons, indices, and symbols to be examined not only in linguistic expressions but also in dramatic situations, characterization, and stage representation, thereby revealing how historical meaning is constructed through multiple layers of signs. However, studies on how historical reality is represented through semiotic signs in these texts remain limited. This research gap highlights the need for a semiotic approach to reveal how literary signs construct historical meaning beyond the explicit narrative.

In semiotics, Peirce's framework serves as a crucial foundation for explaining how signs function in the construction of meaning. Peirce divides signs into three main categories: icons, indices, and symbols. Icons relate to objects through resemblance; indices through a causal relationship or existential proximity; while symbols are constructed through cultural conventions (Bosco, 1959; Liszka, 1996; Pratiwi & Yanti, 2024). Peirce's triadic model explains that meaning emerges through the interaction between the sign, object, and interpretant, making it an effective framework for revealing cultural and ideological meanings in literary texts. In drama, elements such as dialogue,

body language, setting, and dramatic situations function as signs that connect the fictional world with social reality. Therefore, Peirce's semiotics provides both a theoretical and practical framework for interpreting historical, political, and cultural representations in dramatic texts (Bosco, 1959; Koblanov et al., 2025; Thellefsen & Friedman, 2023).

Several studies have shown that semiotic approaches are effective in revealing implicit meanings in dramatic texts. These findings confirm that drama constitutes a complex sign system in which visual and verbal elements convey meanings that extend beyond the development of the plot (Beato, 2022; Ghazvineh & Fahimifar, 2024; Noer et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that semiotic analysis can uncover the ideological, psychological, and sociocultural meanings embedded in dramatic works. Pratama's study (Pratama, 2018), for example, employed structural and semiotic approaches to identify religious values, dramatic elements, and meaningful signs in *Muntangan Alif*. The study identified various icons, indices, and symbols that represented religious and spiritual values, thereby demonstrating the analytical potential of Peirce's semiotic model. In contrast to the present study, which examines the sociopolitical representation of historical events, Pratama's research focuses primarily on religious symbolism and educational values.

Research by Septiani et al. on *Perahu Retak* demonstrates that linguistic and nonlinguistic signs work together to construct symbolic meanings associated with moral and humanitarian crises. The findings indicate that dramatic meaning is produced through the interaction of dialogue, gestures, and theatrical context (Septiani et al., 2025). Likewise, Lestari and Fatoni's (Lestari & Fatoni, 2025) analysis of the performance *Sudah Gila*, which applies Barthes's semiotic framework, reveals that lighting, facial expressions, and vocal intonation generate symbolic meanings that extend beyond the written script. Although their study employs Barthes's rather than Peirce's semiotics, it nevertheless confirms the significant contribution of visual and auditory signs to meaning construction in drama. Syahrir (Syahrir et al., 2024) employs Greimas's semiotic framework to examine the representation of fairy-tale elements in *It's Okay to Not Be Okay*. The findings demonstrate that dramatic narratives construct existential meanings

through interconnected systems of signs. Although the study adopts Greimas's rather than Peirce's semiotic model, this methodological distinction underscores the diversity of semiotic approaches and further affirms the relevance of semiotics as a comprehensive framework for interpreting dramatic texts. Furthermore, research utilizing Peirce's triadic model in theatrical contexts has successfully decoded how material objects and performative environments function as indices of broader ecological and societal realities (Jakaria et al., 2025).

Despite these contributions, previous studies have predominantly focused on religious symbolism, moral values, performance elements, or existential meanings. Limited attention has been given to the use of Peirce's semiotic framework to examine how icons, indices, and symbols construct socio-political representations of Indonesia's 1998 Reform era in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Tiga Drama*. Moreover, few studies have integrated Peirce's icon-index-symbol classification with historical representation to explain how literary signs reconstruct the collective memory of this period. Accordingly, the present study addresses this gap by integrating Peirce's semiotic theory with the analysis of historical representation. It examines how icons, indices, and symbols in *Tiga Drama* simultaneously reconstruct historical reality and transform it through literary imagination.

This study aims to analyze the forms of icons, indices, and symbols in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Tiga Drama* through Peirce's semiotic model by identifying how objective and imaginative realities represent the socio-political conditions of Indonesia's 1998 Reform era. This study is guided by the following research question: How do icons, indices, and symbols in *Tiga Drama* represent historical and imaginative realities in reconstructing the collective memory of the 1998 Reform era? This study is expected to contribute to literary scholarship by demonstrating how Peirce's semiotic framework can explain the role of dramatic texts in preserving collective memory and constructing new interpretations of Indonesia's political transition.

METHOD

Study Design

This study employs a qualitative approach

with semiotic analysis, specifically Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model (sign-object-interpreter). This model is used to uncover how various dramatic elements, dialogue, gestures, dramatic situations, and setting construct social, historical, and political representations in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Three Plays*. This research adopts a qualitative interpretative design because the primary objective is to understand how meanings are constructed through signs embedded in literary texts rather than to measure phenomena quantitatively. Peirce's semiotic framework serves as the analytical lens for interpreting the relationships among signs, objects, and interpretants within the dramatic narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Operationally, Objective Reality in this study refers to historical, political, and social events that constitute empirical references outside the literary text, particularly the socio-political conditions surrounding the Indonesian Reform Era of 1998. In contrast, Imaginative Reality refers to the reconstructed reality created through dramatic representation, where historical experiences are transformed into fictional characters, events, settings, and symbolic expressions to convey broader social meanings. These two concepts are analytically connected through Peirce's semiotic process, in which dramatic signs mediate objective historical reality into imaginative literary representation.

Data Collection

The research data consist of verbal and non-verbal signs identified in the drama text, including dialogue, stage directions, characterization, dramatic situations, settings, and symbolic expressions that potentially represent historical and socio-political meanings. The primary data source is Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Tiga Drama*, while the secondary data sources include books, journal articles, and previous studies on semiotics, drama, and historical representation. The unit of analysis in this study comprises textual segments containing semiotic elements representing objective and imaginative realities, including dialogue, narrative descriptions, stage directions, character interactions, settings, and symbolic expressions. These units were selected because they function as sign systems that represent socio-political meanings through Peirce's triadic model.

Data Analysis

After the data had been collected, the analysis was conducted based on Miles et al. (2014) framework, including comprising data reduction, data display, interpretation of sign–object–interpretant relationships, and conclusion drawing. The signs identified in the text were analyzed by examining their relationships with the socio-political context underlying the drama's production. Each sign was interpreted through Peirce's triadic framework to determine how meaning was constructed and transformed within the dramatic structure. The analysis employed qualitative semiotic procedures involving data reduction, categorization, interpretation of sign–object–interpretant relationships, and synthesis of findings. These procedures were used to explain the historical and socio-political meanings represented in the text.

Third, the researcher conducted a contextual interpretation by relating the semiotic findings to issues of trauma, power, social change, and the search for identity, which constitute the central representational themes in *Tiga Drama*. This stage facilitated a deeper understanding of the plays as a medium for social critique and the reconstruction of collective experience. Finally, the interpretations were compared with the socio-political context of the 1998 Reform era and relevant scholarly literature to maintain interpretative consistency and enhance the credibility of the analysis. Through this procedure, the semiotic method not only identified the forms of signs present in the drama but also explained the process of meaning-making that connects dramatic reality with Indonesia's post-Reform social reality.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, interpretations were continuously compared with historical references and previous scholarly works on Indonesian socio-political history, drama studies, and Peircean semiotics. This analytical triangulation was employed to ensure that the identified signs consistently represented the relationship between objective reality and imaginative reality while minimizing subjective interpretation.

RESULTS

Objective Reality

Objective reality refers to historical events, social conditions, and material objects that exist independently of the literary text and can be

observed, verified, or supported by empirical evidence. Within Peirce's semiotic framework, it encompasses the real-world referents to which signs are connected through resemblance, causal relationships, or socially established conventions. Thus, objective reality functions not merely as a represented construct but also as a reflection of the historical and social conditions that shaped Indonesian society (Harari, 2018; Jappy, 2023; Pelkey, 2023).

The category of objective reality comprises several semiotic markers based on verifiable social and historical realities, as demonstrated by an analysis of Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Tiga Drama*. Based on Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic model classification, 24 signs were identified in this category, consisting of 7 icons, 10 indices, and 7 symbols (Table 1). These three types of signs represent forms of representation that refer to real events, objects, and phenomena in Indonesian society, particularly within the socio-political context of the 1998 Reform era. All of this is explained below. To ensure analytical transparency, each identified sign was coded according to three criteria: (1) the type of sign based on Peirce's classification (icon, index, or symbol); (2) the form of representation (objective or imaginative reality); and (3) its socio-political referent in the context of the 1998 Reform era. The coding process enabled each datum to be systematically classified before being interpreted within Peirce's sign object interpretant framework. Consequently, the presentation of findings directly addresses the research problem concerning how icons, indices, and symbols represent historical reality in *Tiga Drama*.

To demonstrate the methodological rigor of the semiotic analysis, this study provides two representative applications of Peirce's semiotic triangle (Representamen–Object–Interpretant). These visual models illustrate how the triadic analytical procedure was operationalized in interpreting dramatic signs before being consistently applied to all identified data. Only two representative examples are presented visually to avoid unnecessary repetition, while the remaining fifty-two signs are analyzed using the same analytical framework.

The seven primary signs in the Icon category bear a direct resemblance to their referential

Table 1. Objective Reality Based on Peirce's Semiotic Model

No.	Type of Sign	Identified Signs (Representamen)	Interpretant (Symbolic Meaning)	Freq.
1	Icon	Kebaya Sumatera (Sumatran Kebaya) Kaos dan sarung (T-shirt and Sarong) Sandal kulit (Leather Sandals) Televisi dan remot kontrol (Television and Remote Control) Telepon (Telephone) Cikini-Jurang Mangu (Cikini-Jurang Mangu) Ludruk (Ludruk)	Cultural identity Social class Social class Media technology Surveillance Spatial distinction Traditional performing arts	7
2	Index	Parang (Machete), Sabit (Sickle), Tongkat (Stick) Jam tangan (Watch), Ikat Pinggang (Belt), Cincin (Ring), Gigi Emas (Gold tooth) Megafon (Megaphone) Kaset (Cassette), CD, Gitar (Guitar), Kamera (Camera), Celana (Pants), Kaos (T-shirt), Ibu Menangis (Crying Mother) Sengatan listrik (Electric Shock), Dibakar dengan rokok (Cigarette Burn), Tidur di atas balok es (Block of ice) Kota panas (Hot City), Menutup hidung (Covering Nose), Bau busuk (Rotten Smell) Membengkak (Swollen)	Violence Social crisis and economic inequality Political resistance Collective suffering Political repression and human rights violations Environmental deterioration Economic crisis	10
3	Symbols	Dikejar-kejar (Being Chased) Membakar dupa (Burning Incense) Kéré-kéré (Kéré-kéré) Cangkir dan gelas (Cups and Glasses) Korupsi-teror-intimidasi (Corruption-terror-intimidation) Era gila (Crazy Times) Not Jegos	Collective fear Spirituality Marginalization Social hierarchy Abuse of power Moral crisis Cultural convention	7
Total				24

objects. These seven icons include the Sumatran kebaya, a T-shirt and sarong, closed-toe leather sandals, a television and remote control, a telephone, *Cikini Jurang Mangu*, and *ludruk*. These seven signs represent the appearance of observable real objects, whether in the form of material objects or social phenomena familiar within the context of Indonesian culture. For example, the television and remote control icons represent technological artifacts used by society in the late 20th century, while the Sumatran kebaya and ludruk icons represent cultural identities with historical significance in social life. All of these icons are recorded based on their appearance in text quotations and verified as concrete signs depicting factual reality.

In *Tiga Drama* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma, there are a number of icons that represent objective reality through signs that bear a direct resemblance to real objects.

This quote appears in the context of a depiction of family domestic life at the beginning of the story,

which presents the social structure of society.

"Ibu mengenakan sarung dan kebaya Sumatera" [hal. 3]

"Mother wore a sarong and a Sumatran kebaya" [p. 3]

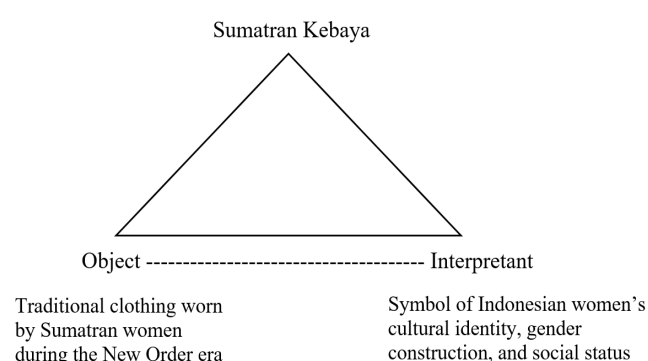


Figure 1. Pierce's semiotic triangle of the icon "Sumatera kebaya"

Figure 1. shows the analysis of the icon *kebaya Sumatera*. The icon of the *kebaya Sumatera* (Sumatran kebaya) symbolizes the cultural identity and social status of Indonesian women during the New Order era. The Sumatran kebaya, a traditional garment featuring songket and gold

thread, symbolizes elegance and luxury, though it lost its symbolic dominance following the 1998 reforms. This icon not only represents cultural identity but also illustrates gender construction in New Order society, where women were positioned as representations of aesthetic beauty and family honor. This representation indicates that gender construction operated not only through explicit political discourse but also through ordinary objects and practices, including dress. The kebaya therefore helps reveal how domestic femininity was linked to broader ideals of social order and respectability. However, its meaning should not be reduced to a fixed association with luxury or privilege, since its interpretation also depends on the cultural and historical context in which it appears.

The perceived decline of the kebaya's symbolic dominance after the 1998 Reform era further demonstrates that signs acquire meaning within changing social conditions. As public values shifted toward greater individual expression and less formalized modes of self-presentation, traditional garments could be reinterpreted rather than simply abandoned. Thus, the *Sumatran kebaya* represents both continuity with established cultural values and the transformation of those values in the post-Reform period. Its significance in the text lies in this tension: the garment preserves a visible connection to tradition while simultaneously exposing the gender expectations and social hierarchies embedded in that tradition.

Furthermore, this excerpt remains within the same family setting but highlights a contrast in identity through the figure of the father.

"Ayah mengenakan kaos putih dan sarung" [hal. 3]

"Father wears a white T-shirt and sarong" [p. 3]

The icon of the "white T-shirt and sarong" represents the ordinariness of domestic life in Indonesian society, where traditional forms of dress coexisted with modern social conditions. Unlike the Sumatran kebaya, which evokes cultural refinement, femininity, and family honor, this attire emphasizes practicality, comfort, and everyday masculinity. Its association with lower-middle-class life should not be treated as a fixed class marker; rather, within this domestic context, it suggests an identity shaped by modesty, accessibility, and continuity with traditional values. At the same time, the white T-shirt introduces a modern and informal element, indicating that modernization did not

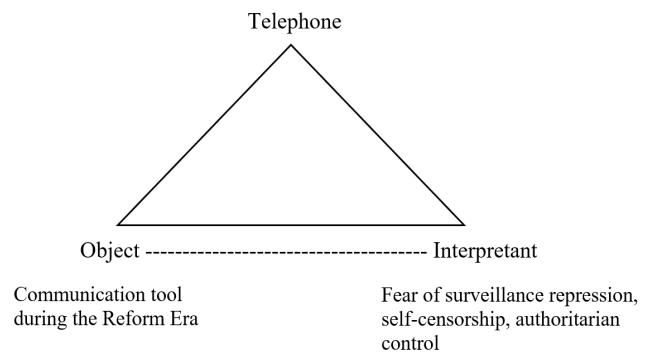


Figure 2. Pierce's semiotic triangle of the icon "Telephone"

immediately displace customary practices but was absorbed into them through ordinary routines. The pairing of the T-shirt and sarong therefore creates a significant contrast with the Sumatran kebaya: together, the two forms of dress expose gendered and class-related distinctions while illustrating how different social identities coexist within the same family space. As an icon, the attire resembles concrete clothing practices; as a representation of objective reality, it reveals the broader tension between tradition and modernization in Indonesian society during the late New Order and the transition to the 1998 Reform era.

The following scene depicts the daily activities of a family that is beginning to be influenced by technological developments.

"Ayah sedang menonton TV. Ibu sedang membaca buku. Ayah sedang memainkan remot kontrol" [hal. 3]

"Dad is watching TV. Mom is reading a book. Dad is fiddling with the remote control" [p.3]

The icons of the television (TV), book, and remote control signify the growing presence of technology and media culture in Indonesian domestic life. Their simultaneous appearance presents the family home as a space increasingly shaped by competing forms of attention and information. While the book represents individualized and relatively contemplative engagement with knowledge, the television provides a shared but highly mediated source of public information, and the remote control introduces the possibility of selecting, regulating, or changing that flow of information. Consequently, the scene reflects not merely the fragmentation of communication within the modern family but also the unequal formation of consciousness through different media. The television and remote control are especially significant because they suggest

that access to information was accompanied by mechanisms of control: although viewers could apparently choose what to watch, the broader range of available information remained conditioned by the mass-media system of the late New Order era. These icons therefore represent both technological modernization and the subtle domestication of ideological control within everyday family life.

This quote appears in a communication situation marked by fear and vigilance.

“Seseorang berkata, ‘Maaf, saya baru saja menelepon, dan saya bahkan menggunakan telepon umum karena saya takut telepon saya sedang disadap’” [hal. 15]

“Someone said, ‘Sorry, I just called, and I’m even using a payphone because I’m afraid my phone is being tapped’” [p. 15]

Figure 2 shows the semiotic analysis of the word *telepon* (telephone). The telephone icon signifies the pervasive anxiety surrounding state surveillance during the late New Order and the transition to the 1998 Reform era. Although the telephone ordinarily functions as a medium of private communication, the fear that it may be tapped transforms it into an instrument of political control. This transformation reveals how surveillance operated not only through direct monitoring but also through the internalization of repression: individuals anticipated state scrutiny, modified their behavior, and practiced self-censorship even in the absence of visible surveillance. The speaker’s decision to use a public telephone therefore indicates more than personal caution; it reflects a broader social condition in which trust, privacy, and freedom of expression had been undermined. As an icon of everyday communication, the telephone thus represents the intrusion of authoritarian power into domestic and interpersonal life, while its fearful use exposes the psychological consequences of a society governed by suspicion.

Furthermore, this dialogue occurs in everyday conversation that indirectly reveals differences in social space.

“Halo! Ya? Nomor Wong! Ini Cikini, bukan Jurang Mangu. Tidak apa-apa. Selamat malam” [hal.16]

“Hello! Yes? Wong’s number! This is Cikini, not Jurang Mangu. It’s okay. Good night” [p.16]

The geographical and cultural references to *Cikini* and *Jurang Mangu* function as icons of social distinction between central Jakarta and its

peripheral areas. *Cikini*, associated with the urban center, signifies greater access to modern facilities, cultural institutions, information, and political-economic power, whereas *Jurang Mangu* evokes the spatial and social margins of the city. The speaker’s correction, “This is *Cikini*, not *Jurang Mangu*”, therefore does more than clarify a location; it reveals how place names carry assumptions about identity, status, and social belonging. The contrast suggests that urban space is unevenly organized, with differences in geography reflecting broader disparities in economic opportunity, mobility, and access to information. At the same time, the exchange shows that these distinctions are embedded in ordinary communication rather than expressed only through formal political discourse. As geographical icons, *Cikini* and *Jurang Mangu* thus represent not merely two locations but a wider structure of center–periphery relations in Indonesian society, exposing how spatial inequality reinforces social hierarchy during the late New Order and the transition to the 1998 Reform era.

This quote appears in a conversation recalling someone’s past.

“Lupa? Anda bilang, ketika masih muda, dia adalah seorang pemain ludruk” [hal.20]

“Forgot? You said, when he was young, he was a ludruk performer” [p.20]

The *ludruk* icon represents traditional folk theater as a concrete form of cultural expression and a medium for social criticism. As a performance tradition rooted in everyday communal life, *ludruk* connects the character’s personal history to broader transformations in Indonesian society. Its mention therefore does more than identify the character’s former occupation; it evokes a public space in which social tensions, political injustice, and cultural change could be represented and questioned. By recalling that he was once a *ludruk* performer, the dialogue also contrasts an earlier form of collective artistic expression with the instability and repression associated with the late New Order and the transition to the 1998 Reform era. Through this icon, Seno depicts objective social reality as shaped not only by political events but also by cultural practices that preserve memory, articulate criticism, and expose changing relations between tradition and modernity.

Index categories within objective reality form the most dominant group of signs, with 10

occurrences indicating a causal relationship and existential closeness between the sign and the object it represents. The indices identified include machetes, sickles, sticks, watches, belts, rings, gold teeth, shouting through a loudspeaker, cassettes, CDs, guitars, trumpets, pants, T-shirts, a crying mother, beatings and electric shocks, cigarette burns, sleeping on a block of ice, cities as hot as this, covering one's nose, decay, and swelling. This data depicts the existence of physical signs and empirically observable actions, such as activities, objects, and bodily reactions. Most indexical signs are found in the context of scenes depicting violence, suffering, and social situations that reflect the state of society during a period of political transition. In Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Three Plays*, a number of indexical signs are used to depict the objective reality of society during the 1998 Reform era.

The following excerpt depicts a situation of mass unrest in a public space

"Setiap malam semua orang berkumpul. Mereka membawa parang, sabit, tongkat, dan entah apa lagi" dan "Orang-orang saling mengejar dari gang ke gang, berteriak keras. Mereka berteriak sambil mengacungkan parang" [hal.12]

"Every night everyone gathers. They bring **machetes, sickles, sticks**, and who knows what else" and "People chase each other from alley to alley, shouting loudly. They shout while brandishing machetes" [p.12]

Seno employs violent indexical signs through the objects *parang* (machetes), *sabit* (sickles), and *tongkat* (sticks). Because these objects are directly associated with the acts of brandishing, chasing, and attacking described in the passage, they function not merely as symbols of violence but as concrete indicators of its occurrence. Their presence transforms the public space into evidence of social disorder, demonstrating that political terror during the Reform era was experienced through material threats and observable acts of aggression. Moreover, the use of ordinary, traditional tools suggests that violence had extended beyond formal state institutions and permeated everyday civil society. These objects therefore reveal how political instability was translated into collective behavior, making social chaos visible through the instruments used to enact it.

This quote appears in a post-riot scene depicting the public's interaction with the victims.

"Warga mengambil jam tangan, ikat pinggang, cincin,

dan akhirnya mencabut gigi emas dari mayat-mayat itu" [hal.21]

"Residents took **watches, belts, rings**, and eventually pulled **gold teeth** from the corpses" [p.21]

This passage reveals a profound moral and social crisis produced by economic inequality, political instability, and the erosion of communal values. The watches, belts, rings, and gold teeth function as indexical signs because their removal from the corpses provides concrete evidence of looting and of the victims' post-mortem exploitation. At the same time, these objects carry symbolic associations with wealth and status; once detached from the bodies, however, they are reduced to commodities, showing how material value has displaced human dignity. The act of extracting gold teeth is especially significant because it transforms even the dead body into an economic resource, demonstrating an extreme form of dehumanization. Rather than representing isolated criminal behavior, the scene exposes how prolonged violence, economic hardship, and the weakening of state authority can normalize opportunism and moral indifference. Through this image, Seno presents the social crisis of the Reform era as both material and ethical: political instability not only produces physical violence but also undermines the values that sustain recognition of human life and dignity.

This quote relates to the dynamics of mass movements and demonstrations.

"Termasuk para pemodal. Bukan mereka yang berteriak-teriak lewat megafon" [hal. 31]

"Including the financiers. Not those shouting through **megaphones**" [p. 31]

An index illustrating student demonstrations during the Reform era appears in the phrase "shouting through a megaphone." The megaphone functions as a concrete indicator of collective political action because it is an object used to amplify demonstrators' voices in public space. At the same time, its amplified sound acquires symbolic significance as the people's demand for democracy, justice, and accountability. The contrast with "the financiers" further suggests that public political movements were not shaped solely by those who spoke openly through megaphones, but also by powerful economic actors who influenced events from less visible positions. Thus, the megaphone represents both the physical presence of protest and the broader struggle over who could speak,

exercise power, and shape Indonesia's political transition during the Reform era.

This excerpt describes interrogation practices and violence during detention

"Mereka bertanya sambil memukulinya. Bertanya sambil menyetrummy" [hal. 44]; "Dia juga dibakar dengan rokok" [hlm. 46]; dan "Diperintahkan untuk tidur di atas balok es" [hal. 47]

"They asked while **beating** him. Asked while **electrocuting** him" [p. 44]; "He was also **burned with a cigarette**" [p. 46]; and "Ordered to sleep on a block of ice" [p. 47]

These indexical signs of violence refer directly to recognizable torture practices, making them concrete evidence of human rights violations during the Reform era. The verbs "beating," "electrocuting," and "burning" establish an immediate connection between the perpetrators' actions and the victim's physical suffering. This causal relationship strengthens the indexical function of the signs: the injuries are not abstract representations of violence but material traces of deliberate abuse. Their occurrence during interrogation further suggests that violence was used systematically to extract information, intimidate detainees, and assert control over vulnerable bodies. The cigarette burns function as micro-signs of torture, revealing not only physical injury but also the repeated and calculated nature of the suffering. Similarly, the command to "sleep on a block of ice" indicates a form of psychological and physical torture designed to exhaust, humiliate, and destabilize the victim rather than merely cause pain. Taken together, these signs expose detention as a site of coercive state power and demonstrate how Seno represents the Reform-era political crisis through observable practices of repression and the bodily consequences they produced.

Seno also presents indicators reflecting the socio-economic and environmental conditions during the Reform era. There are several quotes illustrating the socio-economic conditions.

The following quote illustrates the deteriorating environmental conditions of the city.

"... Aku belum pernah melihat kota sepanas ini. Panas dan bau! (sambil menutup hidungnya) Bau apa itu? Baunya sangat busuk!" [hal. 77]

"... I've never seen a city this **hot. Hot and smelly!** (while covering his nose) What is that smell? It's so bad!" [p. 77]

The description of the city as "this hot" and "so smelly" functions as an indexical sign of

Jakarta's deteriorating environmental conditions during the Reform era. The oppressive heat and foul odor provide concrete sensory evidence of an overcrowded, polluted, and poorly governed urban environment. At the same time, the city's physical stench operates metaphorically, suggesting the "rotting" condition of the broader socio-political order: corruption, violence, and moral decay have become as pervasive as the pollution surrounding its inhabitants. By connecting bodily discomfort with social disorder, Seno shows that the political crisis was not an abstract national problem but a condition experienced directly in everyday urban life. Thus, the image of the overheated and foul-smelling city represents both environmental degradation and the broader collapse of social and political stability during the Reform era.

This quote relates to the impact of the economic crisis on individuals.

"Berlarian mengurus perusahaan Papa, yang berada di ambang kebangkrutan karena utang dalam denominasi dolar tiba-tiba membengkak" [hal. 81].

"Running around managing Papa's company, which was on the verge of bankruptcy because **dollar-denominated debts suddenly ballooned**" [p. 81].

The phrase "dollar-denominated debts suddenly ballooned" functions as an indexical sign of the 1997–1998 monetary crisis, directly linking the depreciation of the rupiah to the rapid increase in the company's debt burden and its subsequent movement toward bankruptcy. This economic consequence illustrates how the crisis translated national financial instability into concrete difficulties for businesses and individuals, while also contributing to the collapse of the New Order regime. Because the sign refers to an actual economic condition through its observable effects, rising debt, financial distress, and the threat of bankruptcy, it demonstrates the indexical relationship between the narrative event and the socio-economic realities of the Reform era. Accordingly, this excerpt can be categorized as objective reality within the semiotic framework, since it represents a historically grounded condition rather than an abstract or purely symbolic idea.

Additionally, there are seven symbols within objective reality, which contain conventional relationships between symbolic forms and socially agreed-upon meanings. These symbols include stalking, burning incense, *kéré-kéré*, cups and glasses, corruption–terror–intimidation, crazy

times, and not jegos. These symbols are recorded as linguistic signs reflecting cultural conventions or common terms recognized in Indonesian society, independent of any physical connection to their objects. The frequency of symbol occurrence is relatively balanced with that of icons: seven data points. Hence, signs in objective reality encompass 24 instances scattered across various scenes in the play's script. All these signs are categorized as forms of representation that directly refer to the real world and are supported by empirical evidence within the text. In Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Tiga Drama*, various symbols are used to depict the socio-political reality of Indonesian society during the 1998 Reform era.

This quote appears in a narrative about the mysterious arrests of citizens.

"Rumah-rumah digerebek, penghuninya dibawa pergi, lalu dibawa ke tempat yang tidak diketahui. Biasanya, mereka tidak pernah kembali" [hal. 19]

"Houses were **raided**, the residents taken away, then brought to who knows where. Usually, they never returned" [p. 19]

The word "raided" functions as a symbol of the state-sponsored raids and abductions targeting pro-democracy activists. Although the act of raiding also carries an indexical connection to the physical violence and forced disappearances experienced by the victims, its symbolic significance lies in the broader meaning it has acquired within the political context of the Reform era. It evokes a collective memory of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and the authorities' abuse of power. Thus, "raided" does not merely describe the seizure of private homes; it represents the systematic destruction of security, trust, and civil rights under repressive rule. The phrase "never returned" intensifies this meaning by suggesting that abduction had become an institutionalized mechanism of intimidation. Consequently, the sign reinforces the community's collective fear of state power and exposes how political repression penetrated ordinary domestic spaces.

This quote relates to the community's traditional ritual practices.

"Setiap Jumat malam, Simbok pergi ke sungai untuk membakar dupa" [hal. 20]

"Every Friday night, Simbok goes to the river to **burn incense**" [p. 20]

The practice of burning incense functions as

a symbol of spirituality, protection, and communal continuity amid the political uncertainty of the Reform era. Because incense burning is conventionally associated with prayer, ritual communication, and protection from danger, it reflects the community's reliance on inherited cultural beliefs to interpret and confront conditions that cannot be controlled through political or rational means alone. The ritual therefore represents more than Simbok's personal act of devotion: it signifies a collective attempt to preserve cultural identity, seek moral order, and obtain spiritual security amid social instability. As a symbolic sign within objective reality, the practice reveals how the political crisis affected not only public institutions and economic life but also the community's private beliefs and everyday coping mechanisms. Accordingly, burning incense demonstrates that traditional spirituality remained an important source of meaning and protection when formal political structures failed to provide security.

This quote portrays a marginalized group on the outskirts of the city.

"Penduduk yang tinggal di sepanjang tepi sungai, 'kéré-kéré,' menunggu mayat-mayat hanyut. Mereka menangkap mayat-mayat itu dengan tongkat bambu yang ujungnya dikaitkan" [hal. 21]

"The residents living along the riverbank, the 'kéré-kéré,' wait for corpses to float by. They catch the corpses with bamboo poles whose ends are hooked" [p. 21]

The symbol "kéré-kéré" represents ordinary people living on the margins of society, particularly those whose poverty and social exclusion place them outside the protection of formal political and economic institutions. Their position along the riverbank, where they wait for and retrieve floating corpses, reveals how the collapse of the New Order regime transformed political violence and economic hardship into the conditions of everyday survival. Although the corpses provide an indexical sign of violence and disappearance, the term "kéré-kéré" functions symbolically by assigning broader cultural meaning to the marginalized community that witnesses, processes, and endures these consequences. It therefore exposes the sharp stratification of Indonesian society and the invisibility of the poor within dominant narratives of power. By portraying the "kéré-kéré" as both witnesses and victims, the play suggests that marginalized citizens are not merely passive observers of national crisis; they are compelled to

absorb its material and human costs. Consequently, this symbol strengthens the representation of objective reality by connecting political repression, economic inequality, and social marginalization within a single image of survival.

This quote appears in a conversation touching on social relations in the workplace.

*"Ya, **cangkir** untuk atasan dan **gelas** untuk bawahan!"* [hal. 25]

"Yes, **cups** for superiors and **glasses** for subordinates!" [p. 25]

This contrast highlights the sharp social stratification between superiors and subordinates. The distinction between a "cup" for the superior and a "glass" for the subordinate is not merely a difference in household objects; it symbolically encodes unequal status, privilege, and access to respect within the workplace. By assigning different vessels to individuals according to rank, the dialogue exposes how hierarchical power relations become normalized through ordinary social practices. Thus, the objects function as symbols of institutionalized inequality, revealing that domination is reproduced not only through formal authority but also through seemingly trivial conventions in everyday life.

This quote relates to a critique of the political system.

*"Ada **korupsi**; ada **kecurangan** dalam pemilihan. Ada **teror** dan **intimidasi**"* [hal. 31]

"There is **corruption**; there is **fraud** in elections. There is **terror** and **intimidation**" [p. 31]

This quote constructs a symbol of corrupt power and the abuse of authority. The repeated structure, "corruption," "fraud," "terror," and "intimidation", forms a semantic field of political repression and exposes the systematic erosion of democratic principles. Rather than referring to isolated misconduct, the sequence suggests that corruption has become embedded in the institutions responsible for governance, including elections and law enforcement. The juxtaposition of electoral fraud with terror and intimidation further indicates that political control operates through both manipulation and coercion. Consequently, these symbols represent a repressive and undemocratic system in which public participation is weakened, civil rights are threatened, and state authority is used to preserve power rather than protect citizens.

This quote is the character's reflection on the

state of the times.

"Era ini memang gila seperti ini. Tanyakan pada hatinuranimu" [hal. 38]

"This **crazy times** like this. Ask your conscience" [p. 38]

The expression "crazy times" functions as a symbolic critique of the moral degradation, political disorder, and social instability that characterized the transition to the Reform era. By echoing Ronggowarsito's concept of "crazy times," the expression frames the historical period not merely as politically turbulent but as a condition in which established moral standards and social norms have been disrupted. The subsequent appeal to "ask your conscience" intensifies this critique by shifting responsibility from external circumstances to individual moral judgment. Thus, the symbol represents an era in which corruption, violence, and social anomalies have become normalized, while conscience remains an essential measure for recognizing and resisting the collapse of ethical order.

This quote appears in a dialogue addressing society's consumerist behavior.

"Benarkah? Hahaha! Orang-orang tidak bodoh! Mereka pasti akan membelinya!" [hal. 47]

"Really? Hahaha! People aren't stupid! **They'll definitely buy it!**" [p. 47]

This statement symbolically represents society's dependence on consumerist culture in the period following economic liberalization. The speaker's confident assertion that people "will definitely buy it" reveals how market logic transforms consumption into an apparently unavoidable social practice, while also exposing the assumption that individuals can be persuaded through desire, novelty, and commercial appeal. In this sense, the dialogue reflects a broader shift in social values: economic liberalization not only expanded consumer choice but also encouraged the perception that social participation and personal satisfaction could be achieved through purchasing commodities. The quote therefore functions as a critique of post-liberalization consumerist capitalism, in which citizens are increasingly positioned as consumers rather than as critical participants in social and political life. Taken together with the other symbols, it strengthens the play's representation of objective reality by demonstrating how the 1998 Reform era produced interconnected changes in Indonesia's economic

practices, social relations, political institutions, and moral values.

The structure of signs in *Tiga Drama* indicates that icons function as visual-realistic representations, indices as causal evidence of social reality, and symbols as culturally agreed-upon constructions of meaning. The dominance of indices signifies that the reality presented by Seno is harsh, empirical, and directly linked to the historical experience of the 1998 Reform. Furthermore, the interaction between these three types of signs forms a semiotic network that not only represents reality but also critiques and deconstructs power.

The findings demonstrate that indexical signs constitute the largest category (10 of 24 signs), indicating that Seno Gumira Ajidarma predominantly constructs historical representation through causal and existential relationships rather than through visual resemblance or conventional symbolism. From Peirce's perspective, indexical signs possess a direct existential connection with their objects (Bosco, 1959); therefore, their

dominance suggests that the representation of the 1998 Reform era is grounded in concrete historical experiences rather than fictional reconstruction alone. This finding directly answers the first research problem concerning the forms of icons, indices, and symbols employed in the drama.

Imaginative Reality

Imaginative reality denotes a constructed form of reality that lacks a direct referent in the empirical world and instead emerges from the author's creativity, imagination, and use of symbolism. From a Peircean semiotic perspective, imaginative reality may nevertheless be represented through icons, indices, and symbols. In this context, the relationship between a sign and its object is conceptual, metaphorical, or fictional rather than empirically verifiable. Imaginative reality functions to establish atmosphere, intensify emotional expression, and communicate critical or abstract ideas that cannot be fully conveyed through representations of objective reality alone (Harari, 2018; Jappy, 2023; Pelkey, 2023).

Table 2. Imaginative reality based on Peirce's semiotic model

No.	Type of Sign	Identified Signs (Representamen)	Interpretant (Symbolic Meaning)	Freq
1.	Icon	Lonceng Westminster (Westminster Chimes) Kerdil (Dwarf) Genderuwo Dukun	Dramatic atmosphere Mythological imagination Symbolic power Ideological persuasion	4
2.	Index	Menghela napas (Sigh) Lampu meredup (Dim light) Musik blues (Blues Music) Seragam robot (Robot Uniform) Mata menyala-nyala (Burning Eyes) Telur kejerman (Egg of Cruelty) Fade In-Fade Out Semangat yang membara (Burning spirit) Nada dingin (Cold tone) Lampu berkedip-kedip (Flashing Lights) Luka batin (Inner Wounds) Mendongak (Looking up) Panggung gelap (Dark Stage) Hitam (Black) Racun (Poison)	Emotional tension Dramatic atmosphere Dramatic atmosphere Oppression Resistance Psychological conflict Dramatic atmosphere Resistance Psychological conflict Inner transformation Psychological conflict Inner transformation Dramatic atmosphere Emotional tension Oppression	16
3.	Symbols	Kroco Heroik (Heroic) Negara bodoh (Stupid Country) Anak mama (Mama's Boy) Menipu/Mengibuli (Con Artist/Deceiving) Monyet (Monkey) Merah (Red) Kaos Hard Rock Cafe (Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt)	Social inequality Irony Political criticism Dependency Manipulation Dehumanization Political stigma Globalization	8
Total				28

Using the same coding procedure as the objective reality category, each imaginative sign was first classified according to Peirce's icon-index-symbol typology before being interpreted based on its symbolic function within the dramatic narrative. This procedure ensured consistency between the analytical framework and the presentation of the findings while allowing comparison between empirical and imaginative representations.

Table 2 shows Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Tiga Drama* also contains a large number of signs that are fictional or imaginative in nature. Within the category of imaginative reality, 28 semiotic signs were identified, consisting of 4 icons, 16 indices, and 8 symbols. These signs are classified as forms of representation related to ideas, metaphors, or narrative developments that have no direct counterpart in the empirical world; rather, they serve to reinforce the atmosphere, emotions, and dramatic message within the text.

Within the icon group, four main signs were identified: the Westminster chimes, the dwarf, the genderuwo, and the shaman. These four icons were identified based on conceptual similarities between the sign and the imaginary object it represents. For example, the genderuwo icon represents a mythological figure in Javanese culture used symbolically to depict specific characters or situations in the text, while the Westminster Chimes icon refers to a foreign element functioning as an aesthetic image with no factual connection to the Indonesian context. Each icon is documented based on its appearance in the text and marked as a fictional representamen.

In the script *Tiga Drama*, Seno Gumira Ajidarma presents a number of icons that constitute an imaginative reality that is, signs that do not represent actual socio-political conditions but rather the result of the author's creativity and symbolism.

This quote appears at the beginning of a scene that establishes a theatrical mood and symbolic atmosphere, not concrete reality.

"Lonceng Westminster berbunyi sepuluh kali dari jendela; bulan sabit terlihat" [hal. 3]

"The Westminster Chimes ring ten times from the window; a crescent moon is visible" [p. 3]

The "Westminster Chimes" icon depicts a situation not directly related to the reality of Indonesia during the 1998 Reform era. The chimes, which refer to Big Ben in London, function more

as a symbol of universal time and a dramatic atmosphere rather than Indonesian social reality, thus falling within the realm of imaginative reality. This icon can also be interpreted as a form of spatial dislocation the blurring of geographical boundaries between the West and Indonesia thereby introducing a global nuance into the local text. Furthermore, the use of the Westminster Chimes reinforces a theatrical and artificial impression, affirming that the scene exists within the realm of imaginative construction, not as a representation of empirical reality.

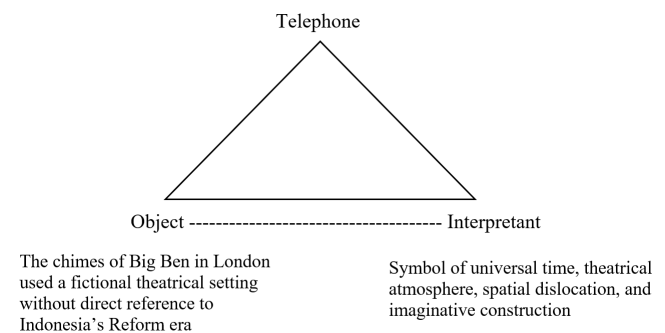


Figure 3. Pierce's Semiotic Triangle of The Icon "Westminster Chimes"

Furthermore, this quote appears in a dialogue that is reflective and conceptual in nature regarding power.

"Kekuasaan kecil" [hal. 16]

"Petty power" [p. 16]

The term "petty" functions as an icon of diminished power: it evokes authority that is limited, ineffectual, and stripped of legitimacy. Rather than referring directly to the historical events of the 1998 Reform era, the expression constructs an imaginative and abstract reflection on the nature of power and human conduct. Its significance lies in the contrast between the apparent authority associated with "power" and the belittling force of "petty," which exposes the moral fragility underlying political domination. In this sense, the phrase does not merely describe weak authority; it also produces an ironic critique of power that seeks to appear substantial while remaining ethically and politically hollow. The use of English further creates symbolic distance from the local historical context, intensifying the phrase's conceptual and theatrical quality. Accordingly, the "petty" icon belongs to imaginative reality because it transforms an abstract judgment about illegitimate power into a fictional and symbolically charged representation.

This quote appears in a conversation comparing humans to mythological creatures.

*“Apa yang Anda gambarkan sebelumnya adalah **genderuwo**; yang kita bicarakan di sini adalah kemanusiaan” [hal. 30]*

“What you described earlier is a **genderuwo**; what we’re talking about here is humanity” [p. 30]

This passage presents a metaphorical comparison between a mythological creature and human beings, exposing the darker dimensions of human nature. Although “*genderuwo*” conventionally denotes a supernatural figure in Javanese mythology, its use here extends beyond literal mythological reference: it becomes a metaphor for frightening, manipulative, and immoral human behavior. The contrast between the *genderuwo* and “humanity” suggests that monstrosity is not located solely in the supernatural realm but may also emerge from human actions and social relations. In this sense, the “*genderuwo*” functions as a psychological projection of collective fear, in which the imagined monster reflects the violence, cruelty, and moral corruption of human beings themselves. The sign therefore operates on two interconnected levels, mythological and psychological, while reinforcing the text’s critique of dehumanization and the disturbing resemblance between human conduct and monstrous behavior.

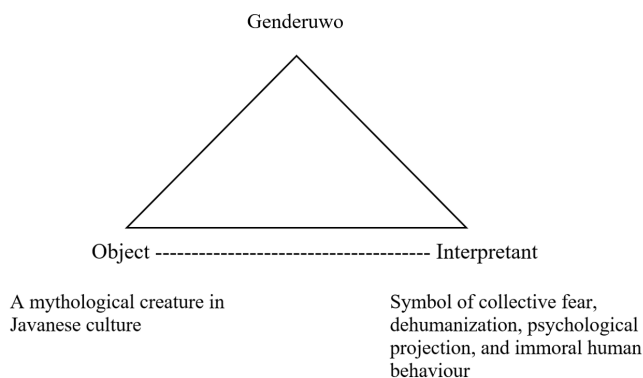


Figure 4. Pierce's Semiotic Triangle of The Icon “Genderuwo”

This quote appears in a dialogue that critiques ideological practices through symbolic comparison.

*“Dia terlalu pandai berkata-kata. Seperti seorang **dukun**. Tapi dia tidak menjual obat. Dia menjual ideologi” [hal. 30–31]*

“He’s too clever with words. Like a **shaman**. But he doesn’t sell medicine. He sells ideology” [p. 30–31]

The “shaman” icon symbolizes the use of rhetoric and persuasion within ideological and political discourse. By comparing an ideologue to

a shaman, the dialogue suggests that persuasive language can function like mystical practice: both rely on performance, belief, and the speaker’s ability to shape how others understand reality. The shaman does not sell medicine but “ideology,” indicating that political doctrines can be presented as products and imposed through verbal manipulation rather than critical reasoning. This comparison therefore exposes the persuasive and potentially deceptive mechanisms through which ideology gains authority.

At the same time, the shaman represents an alternative epistemology, a way of producing, legitimizing, and transmitting knowledge through belief, symbolic performance, and personal authority. Its juxtaposition with modern political discourse creates an irony between the appearance of rationality and the persistence of irrational or quasi-mystical forms of influence in ideological practice. The sign consequently functions as more than a reference to a cultural figure; it becomes an allegorical critique of political rhetoric that disguises manipulation as truth. Thus, the Westminster Chimes, petty power, *genderuwo*, and shaman icons collectively represent the imaginative dimension of the script, transforming abstract political and social concerns into symbolic forms that extend beyond the factual reality of the 1998 Reform era.

Index categories within the imaginative reality are the most dominant, with 16 occurrences. Identified indices include sighs, dim lights, fading blues music (fade in/out), a weasel, a robot uniform, fiery eyes, an egg of cruelty, fading music (fade in) and fading lighting (fade out), a burning spirit of life, a shivering tone mixed with emotion, a cold tone, flickering lights, beauty marked by inner wounds, bending and looking up, a dark stage, black, and poison. All these signs are recorded as indicators of mood, emotional expression, and nonverbal behavior that reflect the characters’ inner states as well as the dramatic dynamics within the text. The use of this type of index indicates a metaphorical existential relationship between the sign and the idea or emotion it represents. However, at this stage of the results, the data is presented solely as the occurrence of these signs without interpretive explanations regarding their symbolic meanings. In the script Tiga Drama, Seno Gumira Ajidarma uses indexing to reinforce the inner mood, emotional movement, and dramatic nuances of his characters.

This quote appears in an emotional dialogue that reveals a character's reaction to a story.

"IBU: (*Menghela napas*) '*Ceritanya terlalu bagus*'" [hal. 33]

"MOTHER: (Sighs) '*That's too good a story*'" [p. 33]

The mother's sigh functions as a nonverbal index of emotional reflection, exhaustion, and resignation in response to the story's emotional impact. Rather than merely accompanying her speech, the sigh reveals feelings that remain unspoken, suggesting that the story evokes an emotional burden too complex to express directly. It also creates a dramatic pause that slows the dialogue and directs attention to the mother's internal response. Thus, the sigh strengthens the scene's psychological depth by connecting the character's physical expression with her concealed emotional state, while simultaneously intensifying the dramatic tension of the exchange.

This quote appears in a narrative depicting a character's distressed and threatened state.

"*Dia punya anak, istri, ibu. Semua orang melihatnya dikejar-kejar seperti musang*" [hal. 12]

"He has a child, a wife, a mother. Everyone sees him being chased like a **weasel**" [p. 12]

The image of the "weasel" portrays the character as frightened, vulnerable, and relentlessly pursued, thereby indexing both fear and the instinct for survival. By comparing a human being to an animal attempting to escape danger, the passage emphasizes his helplessness and the intensity of the threat surrounding him. The comparison also suggests dehumanization: under oppressive conditions, the character is reduced from a rational social subject to a creature governed by fear and self-preservation. This loss of agency exposes how violence and social pressure can undermine human dignity and rational judgment. Consequently, the "weasel" functions not merely as a description of movement but as an imaginative index of psychological distress, powerlessness, and the struggle to survive.

This quote appears in the description of a character's expression during an intense situation.

"matanya **menyala-nyala**" [hal. 43]

"his eyes were **ablaze**" [p. 43]

This index signifies a fighting spirit, inner strength, and resistance in the face of suffering. The image of "ablaze" eyes transforms a physical

detail into an external manifestation of the character's intense emotional and psychological state, suggesting anger, determination, or renewed vitality. Because the expression exceeds ordinary visual description, it produces a hyperbolic effect that heightens the scene's dramatic intensity. Thus, the sign links the character's visible appearance to an underlying struggle, showing how the body becomes an index of concealed emotion and the will to endure oppressive circumstances.

This quote appears in a narrative that criticizes a social system that oppresses individuals.

"*seragam robot*" [hal. 26]

"**robot uniform**" [p. 26]

Meanwhile, this quote critiques a social system that suppresses individuality by reducing human beings to standardized components within an impersonal social machine. The expression "robot uniform" suggests deindividuation: the uniform does not merely regulate appearance but also symbolizes the erosion of autonomy, agency, and free will. By associating the character with a robot, the image implies that oppressive social structures condition individuals to perform predetermined roles rather than act as independent subjects. Although this index is not directly tied to the historical context of the 1998 Reform era, it strengthens the script's imaginative reality by transforming social conformity into a vivid visual metaphor. Through this image, Seno Gumira Ajidarma deepens the dramatic critique of systems that prioritize obedience over humanity and expose individuals to psychological and social alienation.

Additionally, indices in the form of moods and visual symbols frequently appear to build the story's atmosphere. Below is a quote from the stage directions that describes a visual and auditory shift in the scene's atmosphere.

"*Musik blues mulai dimainkan. Lampu meredup. Ayah tenggelam dalam pikiran. Ibu terus membaca. Musik blues memudar*" [hal. 3] dan "*Panggung gelap. Musik Memudar. Pencahayaan Memudar*" [hal. 63]

"**Blues music** begins to play. **The lights dim**. Father is lost in thought. Mother continues reading. The blues music fades out" [p. 3] and "The stage is dark. Music Fade In. Lighting Fade In" [p. 63]

Music and lighting function as coordinated stage indices that mark shifts in mood, attention, and emotional intensity within the scene. The blues music evokes a reflective and melancholic

atmosphere, while the dimming lights externalize the characters' withdrawal into their inner worlds, particularly the father's absorption in thought. As the music and lighting fade, the scene moves toward darkness and emotional suspension, signaling a gradual intensification of psychological tension rather than merely indicating a technical transition. This audiovisual combination engages the audience's sensory imagination by making emotion perceptible through sound, light, and visual atmosphere alongside dialogue. It also demonstrates how modern dramaturgy treats lighting and sound as autonomous semiotic languages: each element contributes meaning independently, yet their coordination produces a stronger representation of the characters' concealed emotional states and the scene's shifting dramatic rhythm.

Furthermore, this quote appears in the description of the city's visually changing backdrop.

"Lampu-lampu itu berkedip-kedip" [hal. 78]

"The lights were flickering" [p. 78]

This illustrates the shifting atmosphere of Jakarta from darkness to a sea of flickering lights capturing the contrasting dynamics of urban life. The flickering lights can also be interpreted as a reflection of the instability of reality, mirroring fluctuating and uncertain social conditions. Elements such as a dark stage, fade-in/out music, and fade-in/out lighting are conventions in the performing arts that Seno uses to build emotional tension and theatrical aesthetics. Thus, these signs demonstrate the author's ability to combine literary language and visual techniques to create a profound dramatic experience.

Additionally, several other devices are employed to reveal the characters' emotional layers and inner conflicts. There are passages within the narrative that depict the characters' psychological states through physical descriptions.

"Wajahnya yang cantik dipenuhi dengan rasa sakit batin yang tak terbayangkan" [hal. 79]

"Her beautiful face was filled with unimaginable inner pain" [p. 79]

This description juxtaposes the character's outward beauty with the invisible wounds of inner trauma, revealing that physical appearance can function as an index of concealed psychological suffering. The contrast between beauty and pain exposes the fractured relationship between the character's external identity and emotional reality,

suggesting that dignity and attractiveness do not protect an individual from violence or oppression. Thus, the image deepens the script's psychological characterization by transforming the face into a visible surface through which suppressed trauma, vulnerability, and emotional conflict become perceptible.

Furthermore, this quote appears in a scene of the character's emotional transformation.

"Clara, yang sebelumnya menunduk, sekarang mendongak" [hal. 80]

"Clara, who had previously been looking down, now looks up" [p. 80]

This gesture symbolizes a psychological shift from resignation to courage, transforming Clara's physical movement from looking down to looking up into a visible sign of resistance. As nonverbal language, the gesture externalizes her renewed self-awareness and agency, marking her movement from a subordinated position toward self-affirmation. Her upward gaze therefore does more than indicate a change in posture; it challenges the power structure that has confined her and makes her emotional transformation perceptible to the audience. Through this indexical action, the script presents bodily movement as a crucial means of expressing suppressed psychological change and the emergence of resistance.

Furthermore, this quote appears in a dialogue that implies suppressed emotions.

"nada dingin" [hal. 69]

"a cold tone" [p. 69]

This phrase functions as an index of pent-up anger and suppressed emotional conflict. Rather than expressing hostility openly, the character's "cold tone" signals an attempt to control and conceal intense feelings, creating emotional distance between the speaker and the interlocutor. This restrained vocal quality therefore reveals that the conflict remains unresolved beneath the surface, while also intensifying the scene's psychological tension and making the character's inner turmoil perceptible through nonverbal language.

This quote appears as the character's affirmative statement regarding their existence.

"Jiwaku masih hidup" [hal. 64]

"My soul is still alive" [p. 64]

This indexical sign transforms the declaration "My soul is still alive" into an act of existential

resistance. By affirming the continued life of the soul amid suffering and oppression, the speaker refuses to be defined by violence, despair, or the forces attempting to erase their identity. The statement therefore signifies more than hope: it asserts psychological endurance, preserves a sense of self, and challenges the power that seeks to reduce the individual to silence or submission. Through this declaration, inner survival becomes perceptible as a form of resistance to crushing social and emotional pressure.

This quote appears in stage directions describing the totality of a dark atmosphere.

"Semuanya gelap di panggung itu. Lantai hitam, layar hitam, semuanya hitam bahkan meja dan kursinya" [hal. 3]

"Everything is dark on that stage. Black floor, black screen, everything is black even the tables and chairs" [p. 3]

In this stage direction, the color black functions as an index of the play's gloomy and psychologically oppressive atmosphere. The repeated presence of black across the floor, screen, tables, and chairs produces an image of total darkness, suggesting that despair has permeated not only the characters' emotional state but also the entire dramatic environment. This visual uniformity erases distinctions between objects and creates a symbolic void in which meaning, hope, and individual identity appear to be suppressed. Consequently, black signifies more than the absence of light; it represents emotional emptiness, nihilism, and the collapse of a stable sense of meaning. The stage therefore becomes a visual expression of the characters' inner condition, transforming psychological desolation into a perceptible theatrical space. Together with the other indexical signs, this setting demonstrates how the author uses visual details to connect external atmosphere with internal suffering, thereby deepening the dramatic and humanistic significance of the imaginative reality constructed in the script.

There are eight symbols in the imaginative reality, including the underling, the hero, the foolish state, the mama's boy, the con artist, the monkey, red, and the Hard Rock Café. All these symbols appear as linguistic representations not rooted in empirical reality, but rather as the result of the author's creative conventions in constructing characterization, conflict, and the story's atmosphere. These symbols are used repeatedly to

reinforce contrasts and irony in the script, although at this stage the presentation of data is limited to recording and categorizing the appearances of these signs.

In the script *Tiga Drama*, Seno Gumira Ajidarma uses symbols of imaginative reality to convey social and psychological ideas through conventional signs that carry specific cultural meanings. This quote appears in a dialogue that directly compares social classes.

"Apakah tempat minum seorang jenderal sama dengan tempat minum rakyat biasa?" [hlm. 25]

"Is a general's drinking spot really the same as a commoner's?" [p. 25]

The symbol *rakyat biasa* (commoners) in this quote represents the entrenched social inequality between rulers and ordinary people. Referring to common people as *rakyat biasa* reduces them to an inferior social category, while the contrast with the general's privileged position exposes the unequal distribution of status, authority, and access within society. The term's pejorative connotation further reinforces the power hierarchy by legitimizing elite superiority and marginalizing those positioned below it. Thus, *rakyat biasa* functions not merely as an insult but as a linguistic symbol of class domination, revealing how language reproduces social distinctions and normalizes the subordination of common people.

This quote appears in a conversation that ironically evaluates someone's actions.

"Mengapa? Karena itu terlalu heroik" [hal. 33]

"Why? Because it's too heroic" [p. 33]

The symbol "heroic" in this quote reflects an ideal of courage, bravery, and moral commitment that is presented as excessive or inappropriate. Its ironic use suggests that actions conventionally associated with virtue may be dismissed as naive when they challenge prevailing social expectations or pragmatic interests. Rather than celebrating courage, the statement distances itself from it, revealing how idealism can be ridiculed in a social environment that prioritizes conformity, self-preservation, or obedience. Consequently, "heroic" functions as a symbol of the tension between principled action and cynical social judgment, exposing how language can undermine courage by recasting resistance as impractical or excessive.

This quote appears in a critique of the system

and individual relationships within society.

“negara bodoh” [hal. 42] dan “anak mama” [hal. 50]

“stupid state” [p. 42] and “mama’s boy” [p. 50]

The symbol “stupid state” constitutes a direct satirical critique of government institutions and policies perceived as irrational, ineffective, or detached from the needs of the people. By reducing the complex failures of governance to the blunt expression “stupid,” the phrase exposes public frustration with the state while using ridicule to challenge its authority and legitimacy. In contrast, “mama’s boy” symbolizes emotional dependence and the failure to achieve socially expected independence. The expression also reflects a gendered construction of masculinity in which maturity, autonomy, and decisiveness are treated as essential masculine qualities. Read together, these symbols extend the script’s criticism from institutional incompetence to individual weakness, revealing how social discourse connects political authority, personal agency, and gender expectations. Thus, they demonstrate that language in the imaginative reality functions not only to describe social conditions but also to expose and question the norms that sustain them.

These quotes appear in the context of criticism of social manipulation and education.

“menipu” [hal. 56] dan “monyet” [hal. 66–67]

“deceiving” [p. 56] and “monkeys” [pp. 66–67]

The symbol “menipu” represents manipulation operating through the educational system, suggesting that education can be distorted from a means of empowerment into an instrument of ideological control. In this context, deception does not function merely as an individual act but as a broader social practice through which knowledge, authority, and institutional power are used to shape public perception and reproduce existing hierarchies. Meanwhile, the symbol “monyet” functions as a dehumanizing social insult that reduces targeted individuals or groups to the status of animals, thereby legitimizing inequality, exclusion, and discrimination. The connection between these two symbols is significant: manipulation makes domination appear acceptable, while dehumanizing language reinforces the social distance between those who exercise power and those who are controlled by it. Together, they demonstrate that the author uses imaginative dialogue as a vehicle for sharp social criticism, exposing how education

and language can operate as mutually reinforcing mechanisms of domination. The animal metaphor therefore does more than express contempt; it reveals the ideological process through which discrimination is normalized and the humanity of marginalized groups is denied.

In addition, visual symbols such as these appear in the visual descriptions of characters and popular cultural attributes.

“merah” [hal. 79] dan “kaos Hard Rock Café” [hal. 39]

“red” [p. 79] and “Hard Rock Café T-shirt” [p. 39]

The *merah* (red) symbol in the quote reveals a deeper layer of meaning than just a physical object. The color red not only symbolizes hair color but also represents political stigma, propaganda, and social fear toward certain groups, as in the expression “red people are dangerous people.” The color red is not merely visual but also ideologically charged, carrying the history of political trauma in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the Hard Rock Café T-shirt serves as a symbol of globalization and Western culture entering the domestic spaces of Indonesian society, signifying a shift in values due to modernity. These symbols also indicate the penetration of Western popular culture into domestic spaces, shifting local identities toward cultural hybridity. Through these symbols, Seno Gumira Ajidarma constructs an imaginative world rich in social and ideological meaning, reflecting the author’s critical perspective on the changing times, power relations, and the identity of urban dwellers amidst Indonesia’s socio-political dynamics

Based on the compilation of these two categories of reality, the distribution of semiotic signs is as follows: 11 icons (21.15%), 26 indices (50%), and 15 symbols (28.85%). From a reality perspective, objective reality accounts for 46.15% of the total signs, while imaginative reality accounts for 53.85%. This indicates that both types of reality are present in nearly equal proportions within the text’s overall structure, with a slightly higher tendency toward imaginative elements.

This data is presented descriptively and qualitatively using a frequentative approach, without inferential statistical analysis or conceptual interpretation. This presentation is intended to show the quantity and distribution of semiotic signs based on Peirce’s classification without interpreting the meaning or relationships between

symbols. Thus, this results section systematically presents empirical evidence regarding the existence and proportion of semiotic signs in the Three Plays manuscript, serving as a foundation for a more in-depth discussion in the Discussion section, which will explain the representational functions and historical meanings of each sign.

Unlike objective reality, imaginative reality is dominated by indexical signs (16 of 28 signs) that primarily function to express psychological states, emotional tension, and symbolic atmosphere. According to Peirce's semiotic theory, indexical relationships are not limited to physical causality but may also indicate existential or emotional connections between signs and their interpretants (Peirce, 1958; Thellefsen & Friedman, 2023). Therefore, Seno Gumira Ajidarma combines historically referential indices with imaginative indices to construct a dramatic narrative that simultaneously records historical trauma and explores its psychological consequences. This finding answers the second research problem concerning how literary signs reconstruct historical and imaginative realities within the drama.

Overall, the distribution of semiotic signs indicates that Seno Gumira Ajidarma intentionally balances objective reality (46.15%) and imaginative reality (53.85%) to construct a multidimensional representation of the 1998 Reform era. While objective signs function to preserve historical memory through empirically recognizable references, imaginative signs expand that historical experience into psychological, ideological, and symbolic dimensions. This interaction confirms Peirce's argument that meaning is generated through the dynamic relationship between the sign, its object, and its interpretant (Bosco, 1959). Consequently, the findings demonstrate that *Tiga Drama* does not merely reproduce historical events but reconstructs them through literary semiosis, allowing readers to reinterpret Indonesia's socio-political transition from multiple perspectives. These findings therefore provide a direct answer to the research problem by explaining how icons, indices, and symbols collectively construct historical representation and collective memory within the drama.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that Seno Gumira Ajidarma's Three Plays contain two

complex layers of representation: objective reality and imaginative reality, which are interrelated to form historical and social meaning. The main finding indicates that indexical signs are the most dominant category, with an occurrence frequency reaching 50% of the total data. The dominance of indexical signs suggests that the representation of reality in this text is deeply rooted in the causal and existential relationships between the signs and the socio-political events they refer to. Thus, these results confirm the hypothesis that the work not only presents dramatic fiction but also reflects a historical record of the transitional period of the 1998 Reform era a period marked by violence, injustice, and social structural changes. These findings directly answer the research problem concerning how Peirce's icon-index-symbol framework represents historical and socio-political realities in *Tiga Drama*. From Peirce's perspective, the predominance of indexical signs indicates that meaning is established through existential and causal relationships between signs and their referents rather than through resemblance or convention alone (Bosco, 1959). Therefore, the dominance of indices demonstrates that Seno Gumira Ajidarma reconstructs the historical experience of the 1998 Reform era through concrete traces of violence, political oppression, and social transformation that remain connected to collective memory.

The presence of objective reality in the form of icons such as television, telephones, *kebaya*, and *ludruk* illustrates a concrete depiction of the lives of both urban and traditional Indonesian communities. Meanwhile, imaginative reality, marked by indices such as robot uniforms, fiery eyes, and a dark stage, reflects the symbolic and psychological dimensions of the public's experience during the Reform era, namely, trauma, anger, and hope. This combination of empirical and metaphorical realities reveals Seno Gumira Ajidarma's semiotic strategy in conveying social truth through symbolic language. The interaction between objective and imaginative realities illustrates that historical representation in *Tiga Drama* is not limited to documenting factual events but also reconstructs their emotional and ideological dimensions. This finding supports Peirce's concept that meaning emerges through the interpretant, whereby readers actively relate textual signs to broader historical knowledge and social experience (Laas, 2016; Lee, 2023). Consequently, historical trauma is represented not only through

factual references but also through symbolic and psychological constructions that invite multiple interpretations. These findings reinforce the idea that literary works, particularly drama, can serve as an “emotional archive of history” that transcends the boundaries of documentary facts (Octafiona, 2024; Septiani et al., 2025).

The findings of this study align with several previous studies highlighting the relationship between literature and socio-historical reality. Previous studies have confirmed that Peircean semiotics is effective in uncovering signs that represent social phenomena in literary texts (Noer et al., 2025; Sofyan et al., 2020). These findings align with the results of this study, where the use of icons, indices, and symbols is capable of revealing the process of transforming reality into artistic constructions. However, unlike previous studies that primarily focused on identifying individual signs, the present study demonstrates how the interaction among icons, indices, and symbols forms an integrated semiotic network that reconstructs historical representation. This broader analytical perspective constitutes the study’s principal contribution by explaining not merely what the signs represent but also how they collectively generate historical meaning within the dramatic text. Furthermore, (Ningrum et al., 2026), found that post-reform literary works tend to contain social criticism through symbolic representations of power and the suffering of the people. This is also evident in *Tiga Drama*, where symbols such as corruption, terror, intimidation, and madness reinforce criticism of the morality and power structures of that era (Octafiona, 2024).

This study will reveal new insights that differ from previous semiotic studies of Seno Gumira’s works, such as *Jazz*, *Parfum*, and *Insiden*, which emphasize urban imagery and journalistic narratives. In *Tiga Drama*, the semiotic structure is more theatrical and performative, placing historical reality within a dramatic framework that allows for emotional and reflective readings. Thus, the results of this study expand the perspective that semiotics in Seno’s works is not only narrative but also theatrical and communicative, presenting social reality as an event that can be “re-enacted” on stage. This finding extends previous studies by demonstrating that theatrical discourse possesses a dual representational function. On the one hand, it preserves collective memory through references to

historical events; on the other hand, it reconstructs those memories through dramatic imagination, thereby enabling audiences to reinterpret Indonesia’s political transition from new social and cultural perspectives.

Theoretically, this research enriches the study of Indonesian literary semiotics, particularly within the context of drama analysis. The finding that indices are more dominant indicates that literary works can function as a bridge between text and socio-historical context, thereby reinforcing Peirce’s theory in understanding the relationship between sign, object, and interpreter in fictional works (Dewi & Hamlianor, 2024; N. Hanifah et al., 2025; N. A. Hanifah et al., 2025; Kusumaningsih et al., 2024). From a practical perspective, this research has significant implications for literary and theater education. Such semiotic analysis can serve as a model for teaching drama appreciation in schools and universities, enabling students to interpret literary works not only from an aesthetic perspective but also from social and historical perspectives. By fostering a critical engagement with these signs, educators can encourage students to recognize how local wisdom and symbolic narratives often counteract the dehumanizing effects of authoritarianism (Sahid et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce Peirce’s proposition that signs categories of icon, index, and symbol before being analyzed through operate dynamically through the interaction between the representamen, object, and interpretant. In *Tiga Drama*, this interaction allows literary signs to function simultaneously as historical evidence, symbolic criticism, and aesthetic expression, thereby extending the application of Peircean semiotics to the analysis of Indonesian historical drama.

Despite providing a comprehensive account of the objective and imaginative realities in *Tiga Drama*, this study has several limitations. First, it examines only the written text and excludes nonverbal elements such as body language, intonation, and visual staging, which are important sources of meaning in theatrical performance. Therefore, the findings primarily describe the semiotic structure of the script rather than the full meaning produced on stage. Second, the descriptive qualitative approach does not include quantitative measures or inter-rater validation

in the identification of signs. Consequently, the interpretations are subjective and may differ across researchers. Third, the study focuses on only one work by Seno Gumira Ajidarma. Generalizations about the author's broader body of work or Indonesian drama should therefore be made cautiously.

Future studies that integrate textual analysis with performance and audience-reception research would provide a more comprehensive account of how historical meaning is produced, interpreted, and transmitted through dramatic works. Such an approach could further strengthen the relationship between semiotic theory, historical representation, and collective memory in Indonesian literary studies. Hence, future research is expected not only to expand the application of semiotic theory in Indonesian literature but also to advance understanding of literature's role in preserving historical consciousness and interpreting the relationship between individual experience and national memory.

Based on the results and limitations discussed above, several directions for future research can be proposed. First, subsequent studies could adopt a multimodal semiotic approach by examining not only textual signs but also the visual, performative, and auditory dimensions of *Tiga Drama* in performance. Such an approach would clarify how nonverbal elements contribute to the expansion and construction of meaning on stage. Second, comparative research involving the works of Seno Gumira Ajidarma and other Indonesian playwrights, such as Putu Wijaya and Arifin C. Noer, could deepen understanding of how different writers employ systems of signs to represent sociopolitical realities across historical periods. Third, interdisciplinary studies that combine semiotics with research on collective memory and social trauma merit further development, particularly because *Tiga Drama* represents the nation's social experiences through symbols of suffering, resistance, and imaginative reconstruction. In this context, imaginative reality functions as a medium that connects the characters' inner experiences with society's collective memory.

V. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the application of Peircean semiotics is capable of revealing the depth of meaning in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Tiga Drama*, where icons, indices, and symbols function not

only as signifying elements but also as mechanisms of historical representation that connect the text to the nation's social experience during the 1998 Reform era. Therefore, this study concludes that *Tiga Drama* functions as a semiotic document that records, processes, and reflects Indonesia's collective memory, while also demonstrating that Peirce's semiotic studies constitute a relevant and productive approach to understanding drama as a medium of historical and social representation. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The analysis is limited to the textual dimension of the drama and does not include performative elements such as actors' gestures, vocal intonation, stage movement, lighting, or audience reception, all of which may generate additional layers of semiotic meaning. The findings are based on a qualitative interpretative approach using a single literary work; therefore, the interpretations remain context-specific and should not be generalized to all Indonesian dramatic texts.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to employ multimodal semiotic approaches that integrate textual, visual, auditory, and performative elements in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of meaning construction in dramatic works. Future studies may also extend application of Peirce's semiotic framework to other dramatic works and historical contexts in order to broaden its analytical applicability. Practically, the findings of this study may contribute to literature and theatre education by encouraging the use of semiotic analysis as an approach to developing students' critical understanding of literary texts as representations of historical and socio-political realities, while also supporting the preservation of Indonesia's collective cultural memory through dramatic literature.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors have read and followed the ethical requirements for publication in **Jurnal Arbitrer** and confirm that the current work does not involve human subjects, animal experiments, or any data collected from social media platforms.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Iwan Marwan was responsible for the conceptualisation of the study, methodology design, data curation, and formal analysis. IM

also validated the research findings and wrote the original draft of the manuscript.

Amin Zuhri performed formal data analysis, validated the research findings, and reviewed and edited the manuscript to improve its overall quality.

Nurul Dwi Lestari conducted literature searches, reviewed relevant texts, historical archives, or theoretical sources, and systematically organized and curated the bibliographic data..

Anwariyah provided study materials, equipment, or research subjects (resources), created informative data visualizations/figures, and contributed to manuscript review and editing.

Ahmad Faizi oversaw the overall research progress

(supervision) and managed the administrative tasks and coordination of the research project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the support of the people to the people who have helped complete this manuscript. There is no funding associated with the research or writing of this article.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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