

Fear of independence: A psychoanalytic approach to the main female character's longing for love in *Cantik Itu Luka*

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Abstract: One of the psychological issues often experienced by women is a fear of independence. This issue can affect women from diverse backgrounds and is reflected in the novel *Cantik Itu Luka*. This study aims to explain the variations, causes, and coping efforts related to women's fear of independence as depicted in the novel. The research employs a psychoanalytic approach. Data were collected through close reading and detailed note-taking. The validity of the data was ensured through semantic validity using intrarater techniques involving repeated and careful readings. The findings reveal three key variations of fear of independence experienced by the character Si Cantik: (1) yearning for a partner who can provide protection, care, and happiness, (2) a desire to always be looked after, and (3) anxiety about living alone and being abandoned by a partner. The causes of this fear are: (1) overprotective parenting that excessively interferes in a child's life, and (2) a negative self-concept related to physical appearance. Despite these tendencies, Si Cantik eventually overcomes her fear through: (1) recognizing her inner strength and potential, and (2) learning to respect herself while accepting her weaknesses.

Keywords: *Cantik Itu Luka*, novel, fear of independence, female character



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INTRODUCTION

Literary works are often viewed as portrayals of human life. This can be demonstrated by tracing references to reality within literary texts (Abrams, 2016). In line with this conception, Sumardjo (1999) stated that literary works also reflect the thoughts of their creators concerning life's problems. Teeuw (2013, p. 181) expressed a similar view, asserting that literature can be categorized as a social document that records human issues. These perspectives lead to a collective understanding that literary works always represent aspects of real human life, including psychological problems experienced by women. As explained by Nurgiyantoro (2019), Rahman (2021), and Kuntarti et al. (2014) fictional literary works consistently depict characters and their attributes, including attitudes, behaviors, actions, and behavioral tendencies. Therefore, when analyzing character development in fiction, it is important to distinguish between two types of characters: flat and round. Flat characters represent a single aspect of personality, whereas round characters display multiple facets of their personalities (Foster via Turaeni, 2015:235).

One of the works of fiction that effectively portrays complex characters and their personalities is *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan. Regarding the depiction of female characters and their personalities in this novel, several female characters are presented with intricate and well-developed traits. For instance, Dewi Ayu is described as a strong, resil-

ient, and independent woman. Before her transformation into a resilient figure, she is depicted as someone who faced significant life challenges that influenced her personality development. Similarly, Dewi Ayu's children are characterized by distinct personalities. Alamanda is portrayed as a resilient figure, Adinda and Maya Dewi as obedient women, and Si Cantik as a woman who deeply longs for a male presence. The skillful portrayal of these characters within the interwoven narrative of this novel has attracted the attention of researchers, particularly with a focus on its female characters.

Several studies have analyzed the portrayal of women in *Cantik Itu Luka*. For example, Wiyatmi (2009) examined the representation of gender roles and relations in *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan and *Nayla* by Djenar Maesa Ayu. Todiho and Djumati (2019) further analyzed the depiction of women in the novel using feminist literary criticism. Shofiyah (2019) explored women's resistance in the novel from the perspective of socialist feminism, while Damayanti and Nasution (2022) focused on the reflection of women's struggles during the colonial period in *Cantik Itu Luka*.

In more recent years, Aryani et al. (2021) investigated feminist themes within the novel, while Choir (2021) specifically examined Dewi Ayu's patriotism. Febrianti et al. (2023) addressed gender inequality present in the novel, and Zaini (2020) explored the inner conflicts among characters. Rizki and Israhayu (2024) conducted an analysis of the characterization in *Cantik Itu Luka*, including the female characters, while Padmasari et al. (2024) focused on the representation of women's imagery in the novel. Previous research has primarily focused on the portrayal of strong female characters, highlighting their roles, struggles, and resistance. However, another equally intriguing issue to explore is the representation of female characters who experience a fear of independence. This aspect, in the context of *Cantik Itu Luka*, has rarely, if ever, been explored in previous studies. Upon closer examination, this issue can be analyzed through the lens of the *Cinderella Complex*.

The term 'Cinderella Complex' originates from the Cinderella fairy tale, which has variations across cultures. This tale narrates the story of a girl who finds happiness when she is saved by a prince (Su, 2010). Cinderella Complex refers to a psychological problem experienced by women in the form of a fear of independence. Women who experience this fear often yearn for the arrival of a "savior prince" or an external force they believe can save their lives (Dowling, 1989). Seng (2018) also noted that women are more vulnerable to mental problems than men due to biological factors, heredity, and self-confidence, which reinforces the need for external support. Lerner (1986) further explained that the persistence of the Cinderella Complex is influenced by patriarchal ideology, which places men in dominant positions in society. In literary studies, the Cinderella

Complex has been the subject of investigation by many researchers, especially in relation to how it manifests in female characters and the underlying causes. Previous studies examining the Cinderella Complex in literary works—particularly novels—include those conducted by Asmarani (2011), Intan (2019), Hussein (2020), ÖZATA (2021), Asriyanti et al. (2022), and Hargita & Nurhadi (2023).

Theoretically, the study of women who experience a fear of independence can be further examined through the lens of Karen Horney's psychoanalytic theory. According to Horney (as cited in Tong, 2017), women's feelings of inferiority are not biologically or inherently rooted in their awareness of anatomical differences—such as the Freudian notion of castration anxiety—but are instead shaped by sociocultural factors, including patriarchal norms, gendered expectations, and relational dynamics. These social influences can lead women to internalize a sense of inadequacy or dependence, which may manifest in their psychological development and interpersonal relationships. In addition, Horney (as cited in Feist et al., 2017) proposed that individuals develop neurotic strategies to cope with anxiety and psychological insecurity, which she categorized into three neurotic trends: (1) moving toward people, (2) moving against people, and (3) moving away from people. These strategies reflect unconscious attempts to manage inner conflict and feelings of helplessness. The first strategy—moving toward people—involves seeking excessive approval, affection, or support from others in order to feel secure. This defense mechanism is especially relevant to the concept of the Cinderella Complex, as it parallels the behavioral patterns of women who fear independence and seek protection or validation through dependency on others, particularly romantic partners. Rather than developing autonomous self-worth, individuals exhibiting this tendency rely on the presence of a stronger figure—often male—to navigate emotional challenges and to affirm their identity.

Thus, applying Horney's psychoanalytic framework allows for a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the Cinderella Complex. It highlights how the interplay between social conditioning and neurotic coping strategies can contribute to persistent patterns of emotional dependence in women, which are frequently portrayed in literary narratives.

Building upon the explanations above, *Cantik Itu Luka* becomes particularly interesting to study in terms of the fear of independence experienced by its female main character. This research focuses on three aspects: the variations of fear of independence experienced by the female characters, the causes of this fear, and the efforts made by these characters to break free from its constraints.

METHOD

This research is classified as a qualitative descriptive study aimed at examining the tendency toward the fear of independence experienced by the character Si Cantik in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Cantik Itu Luka*. A psychoanalytic approach is employed to analyze the psychological dimensions of this character, particularly as they relate to her fear of independence.

The source of data for this study is the novel *Cantik Itu Luka*, authored by Eka Kurniawan and published by Gramedia in 2021. Data were derived from textual elements, including words, phrases, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs expressed through dialogues involving Si Cantik, responses from other characters, indirect descriptions by the author, and direct narration. These elements were examined in-depth to identify indications of the fear of independence. Data collection was conducted using close reading and recording techniques, with the researcher preparing detailed guidelines beforehand to ensure consistency in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data.

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through semantic validity, which measures the sensitivity of the analytical technique to symbolic meanings within specific contextual frameworks. To ensure reliability, the researcher conducted repeated and thorough readings of the data until reaching saturation, employing intrarater reliability to maintain consistency in interpretation and categorization. This approach is expected to produce reliable and valid findings by achieving consistency and depth in the analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using a structured qualitative method commonly employed in literary studies. This process involved comparing textual elements to identify recurring patterns, categorizing the data based on thematic relevance, presenting the findings systematically, drawing inferences to answer the research questions, and verifying conclusions by cross-referencing them with the original data. This comprehensive methodological framework aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the psychological dimensions of Si Cantik's fear of independence as depicted in *Cantik Itu Luka*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The detailed findings regarding the fear of independence exhibited by Si Cantik are presented in following Table 1. The findings include the variants of fear of independence, as well as the causes and attempts made by the character to overcome the fear.

Tabel 1. Fear of Independence in the Novel *Cantik Itu Luka*

No.	Unit Analysis	Variant	Description
1	Forms of fear of independence	Craving for a partner who can protect, nurture, and make happy	<p>Every night, on the veranda of her house, Si Cantik always eagerly anticipates the arrival of man who will become her partner. Despite the fact that the man's arrival is uncertain, she continues to wait for him.</p> <p>Si Cantik gains a boost of confidence from an angelic figure who accompanies her as she waits for the arrival of the man who will become her lover.</p>
		A desire to always be cared for	<p>When the male figure nicknamed Sang Pangeran by Si Cantik returns to her house, she applies makeup all day to look beautiful. She does this in order to capture Sang Pangeran's attention.</p> <p>Si Cantik appears joyful when Sang Pangeran discloses that he has been observing her for an extended period and expresses his desire to get to know her.</p> <p>Si Cantik not only remains silent, nods, and shakes her head when she meets Sang Pangeran again, but she also endeavors to capture Sang Pangeran's attention</p>
		Anxiety about living alone and the fear of being abandoned by a partner	<p>Si Cantik feels anxious because during her teenage years, she never had a partner like other women her age.</p> <p>Si Cantik did not tell Sang Pangeran that she was pregnant. She feared Sang Pangeran would abandon her if he found out.</p> <p>Every time she met Sang Pangeran, she always asked him to make sure why he was willing to be her lover.</p>
2	Causes of fear of independence	Overprotective parenting that intervenes excessively in a child's life	<p>Si Cantik was raised by Rosinah with utmost care. Rosinah was willing to do anything to ensure that Si Cantik grew up well, just like other girls.</p> <p>Si Cantik receives intervention from her mother when her mother discovers her desire to be with a man. After Si Cantik became involved with Sang Pangeran, her mother felt hurt.</p>
		A negative self-concept related to physical appearance	<p>Si Cantik always looks down on herself and feels that she is not liked by others because of her unattractive physical appearance. For this reason, she never leaves the house because she doesn't want to face reproach from others</p> <p>Si Cantik is highly critical of minor offenses that upset her. This is evident in her interactions with Dewi Ayu. Si Cantik frequently raises her voice to reprimand Dewi Ayu during their conversations because she perceives them as insulting.</p>
		Identifying with her own strengths and potential	<p>After Sang Pangeran passed away, Si Cantik started to discover her own identity. She realized that she could no longer have a relationship with Sang Pangeran</p> <p>Si Cantik tries not to succumb to deep sadness. For this reason, she attempts to build close relationships with her other sisters and support one another.</p> <p>Si Cantik begins to learn to forget about Sang Pangeran. She spends her days visiting his sister's house.</p>
3	Attempts to escape the fear of independence	Respecting herself while accepting her own weakness	<p>Si Cantik tries to regain her self-respect after being abandoned by Sang Pangeran. She has made peace with the situation that befell her and has started to venture outside her house, regardless of the ridicule from people in her neighborhood.</p>

Table 1 illustrates that the inclination of fearing independence experienced by Si Cantik in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Cantik Itu Luka* can be categorized into three forms: (1) yearning for a partner who can protect, nurture, and bring happiness, (2) a desire to always be cared for, and (3) anxiety about

living alone and the fear of being abandoned by a partner. The underlying causes of these inclinations are twofold: (1) overprotective parenting that intervenes excessively in child's life, and (2) a negative self-concept related to physical appearance. Additionally, the character of Si Cantik endeavors to break free from the fear of independence through (1) self-identification regarding her own position and potential, and (2) respecting herself while accepting her own weakness.

Discussion

A psychological issue frequently faced by women is the “desire to be rescued.” This often leads to a fear of living life alone, without the presence of a man. From the perspective of the *Cinderella Complex*, women throughout history have been raised to depend on men for nearly everything, including their sense of peace and happiness. As a result, when they find themselves without a man, they may feel vulnerable and uncertain about navigating life on their own. Throughout human civilization up to the present day, even when women attempt to cultivate self-sufficiency, they often find themselves entangled in a deep psychological struggle. This struggle is referred to as the “fear of independence” (Dowling, 1989: 16).

The analysis of female characters in *Cantik Itu Luka*, *The House of Mirth*, *Eiffel I'm in Love*, and *Bumi Manusia* reveals recurring themes of fear of independence among women across various literary and cultural contexts. In *Cantik Itu Luka*, the character of Si Cantik demonstrates strong dependence on male figures, particularly on the Prince and her lovers, as she seeks psychological protection and emotional security from them. Her behavior reflects a reluctance to embrace independence, which mirrors the character of Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*. Lily also displays fear of independence, evident in her behavioral patterns that rely on external support for her emotional well-being (Asmarani, 2011). A similar pattern can be observed in Tita, the main character of *Eiffel I'm in Love*, whose fear of independence manifests in her continual spoiled behavior—projected as a feminine trait (Intan, 2019). This tendency is also found in *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. According to Hargita and Nurhadi (2023), Annelies Mellema is portrayed as a character afraid of independence due to an overly protective and controlling upbringing, which hinders her psychological development. While Annelies recognizes her dependence and expresses a desire to free herself from her emotional dependence on Minke, her efforts ultimately fail. She remains trapped in a psychological conflict that prevents her from achieving true independence.

The understanding of women's roles in the production and dissemination of literary works provides a broader perspective in this context. Jeep (1997) argues that women are not merely passive subjects within texts, but also active participants in the creation and dissemination of literary works. This understanding is crucial as it broadens the way we perceive women's

contributions to literary culture—not just as symbols of dependence, but also as agents negotiating space for personal agency within social and narrative confines.

Dyke and Murphy (2006) highlight that women often define success through the maintenance of meaningful relationships, an achievement that is more central to women than to men. In this context, the desire for emotional connection should not be viewed solely as a weakness or dependence. Rather, it reflects a different understanding of fulfilment—one that integrates relational needs with the achievement of independence. Similarly, Locatelli (2007) further explores how love, as a relational force, shapes the way women understand knowledge and agency. The relational ambivalence of love captures women's appreciation for the relational quality of knowledge and the politics of desire that shapes feminist epistemology. This perspective shows how relational values and the desire to connect can contribute to a feminist understanding of agency, where dependence and independence exist in tension, not opposition.

Overall, these perspectives demonstrate that while the female characters analyzed may appear dependent on men, their experiences are shaped by intricate psychological, cultural, and social dynamics. Characters like Si Cantik are not merely submissive figures—they are complex individuals navigating between personal desires, self-concept, and social expectations. Her conscious attempts to resist dependency highlight the nuanced and multidimensional nature of female agency in literature.

Following is further discussion on the fear of independence experienced by Si Cantik in *Cantik Itu Luka*, in terms of its variants, causes, and attempts to escape from the fear.

Variants of Fear of Independence

Craving for a partner who can protect, nurture, and make happy

Over time, the fear of independence can develop into a profound sense of inner solitude experienced by women. This solitude often manifests as a psychological yearning to be “rescued” by a male figure (Dowling, 1989: 47). Within the framework of the *Cinderella Complex*, such a yearning reflects the internalization of patriarchal values that condition women to associate security and happiness with male presence and protection. This psychological phenomenon is exemplified in the character of Si Cantik in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Cantik Itu Luka*.

Si Cantik is depicted as a young woman who isolates herself, rarely stepping outside her home due to a deep-seated belief that her physical appearance is grotesque and frightening to others. Her fear of being judged or rejected reinforces her dependence on Rosinah, her mother's loyal maid, and prevents her from establishing meaningful social interactions. This withdrawal from the outside world illustrates not only her insecurity but also her psychological dependence on the idea of male salvation. Her desire

for a male partner—someone who can offer protection, affection, and fulfillment—becomes a central motif in her daily routine.

This longing is ritualized in her nightly behavior. Nearly every evening, Si Cantik ascends to the rooftop or sits on the front porch, awaiting the arrival of a male figure. Rosinah frequently expresses concern over this behavior and directly questions Si Cantik's intentions. Si Cantik consistently replies, "I am waiting for my Prince to come and rescue me from the curse of an ugly face" (Kurniawan, 2021: 22). This statement encapsulates her internal conflict: a fear of rejection coupled with an idealized hope for romantic rescue.

The repetitive nature of her waiting suggests an unresolved psychological fixation. Despite the absence of any tangible male figure, she continues the ritual night after night, driven by her belief in an angelic being who has accompanied her since childhood. Within the narrative, however, this figure is later revealed to be a malevolent spirit. Nonetheless, Si Cantik perceives it as a guardian who assures her that a prince will eventually come. This belief system reinforces her passive stance and her resistance to independence. The depth of her emotional dependency is reflected in the following passage:

"But she believed her angel would not lie, so she waited again on the second night. A funeral procession passed by, but no prince. A vendor selling *bajigur* passed as well, but did not stop—not even a glance. There was no prince, until finally she fell asleep on the chair from exhaustion, and Rosinah came to carry her to bed" (Kurniawan, 2021: 491).

This passage confirms Si Cantik's unwavering belief in the promise of male rescue, underscoring the persistence of the *Cinderella Complex* as a psychological construct. Despite the absence of any real prince, her longing is sustained through fantasy and reinforced by her interactions with a supernatural being. Her refusal to embrace autonomy reflects a fear of independence deeply rooted in societal constructs of femininity and emotional dependence on male presence.

A desire to always be cared for

In certain situations, women subtly express their desire to be noticed, pampered, and praised by men—gestures that reinforce their sense of delicacy, femininity, and worth. These acts of attention are not merely superficial; they are integral to an inner affirmation that strengthens a woman's self-image and emotional stability. Specifically, the affirmation of being "both attractive and successful" (Dowling, 1989: 156), serves to bolster a woman's sense of value, contributing to her emotional well-being. This psychological pattern is clearly reflected in the character of Si Cantik in Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka*, whose deep yearning for validation is ev-

ident throughout the narrative. Si Cantik's desire to be acknowledged and admired by Sang Pangeran, the man she admires, becomes a central aspect of her emotional world, guiding her actions and interactions.

This longing for acknowledgment becomes particularly apparent when Sang Pangeran visits her for the second time. During their first encounter, Si Cantik is captivated by his physical appearance, an event that leaves a lasting impression on her psyche. As a result, she spends the entire day preparing herself for their next meeting—carefully selecting her attire, applying makeup, and obsessing over how best to present herself. This obsessive preparation reflects her desire for the validation she feels is necessary to affirm her own attractiveness. Her behavior, however, causes concern for Rosinah, her mother's servant, who is both confused and saddened by Si Cantik's actions. The servant's concern highlights the extent to which Si Cantik's need for external affirmation has overridden her own emotional well-being (Kurniawan, 2021: 492).

Si Cantik's deep-seated desire for attention and recognition is further validated when Sang Pangeran confesses that he has been observing her for a long time. This revelation offers Si Cantik the emotional validation she has been hoping for, fulfilling a long-held fantasy of being desired by the man she admires. After inviting her to sit beside him, Sang Pangeran expresses his wish to meet her, get to know her, and even touch her—words that serve as the emotional affirmation Si Cantik has been eagerly waiting for (Kurniawan, 2021: 493). These expressions of longing and affection confirm her own desires, affirming her belief in her own worthiness and attractiveness. For Si Cantik, these moments of acknowledgment mark a profound emotional turning point, reaffirming her deep-rooted need for validation and attention from an admired figure.

In their subsequent meeting, Si Cantik's desire for further validation compels her to act in ways she had not before. During their first encounter, she had remained shy, silent, and passive—responding only with blushes, nods, and shakes of the head. However, in this next encounter, Si Cantik resolves to change her behavior. She promises herself that she will no longer remain silent or passive; instead, she will speak and engage in conversation with Sang Pangeran. This newfound resolve stems from her desire to capture his attention and keep him engaged, to ensure that he does not grow bored or disinterested in her presence. As expressed in the following passage:

“By the weekend, however, Si Cantik promised herself that she would speak. She would no longer remain silent, or just blush, nod, and shake her head. She had to talk and do whatever it took to make sure Sang Pangeran did not grow bored of her” (Kurniawan, 2021: 494).

This passage illustrates Si Cantik's inner struggle and her desire to overcome her natural timidity in order to assert her presence and ensure that

she remains the focal point of Sang Pangeran's attention. Her determination to actively engage in conversation underscores her deep-seated longing for validation and affirmation, signaling her desire to be at the center of romantic attention. This behavioral shift reflects a psychological pattern in which Si Cantik seeks to mold herself into the ideal partner in order to maintain the attention and affection of the man she idolizes.

In conclusion, Si Cantik's actions vividly portray the psychological dynamics at play in her search for validation. Her desire to be noticed by the man she admires propels her to transcend her initial passivity, encouraging her to become more assertive in her interactions. This narrative pattern is indicative of a broader psychological struggle for affirmation that is deeply tied to her sense of self-worth and emotional fulfillment. Si Cantik's longing for acknowledgment is not merely a superficial desire but a fundamental aspect of her psychological makeup, illustrating the complex interplay between romantic admiration and self-affirmation.

Anxiety about living alone and the fear of being abandoned by a partner

A person who experiences ambivalence towards autonomy, a fear of separation, independence, and solitude, often feels anxious about living alone without a partner. Such individuals may be unconsciously striving to restore a primitive empathic connection between a pre-verbal infant and their mother. This desire for "fusion" stems from the wish to remain united, never to be alone, and to deny any form of separation or difference (Wexler & Steidl via Dowling, 1989: 117). This psychological pattern, marked by a deep-seated fear of abandonment, is also clearly evident in the character of Si Cantik from Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka*.

In the narrative, Si Cantik's longing for connection and fear of abandonment manifest in her constant anxiety about losing her partner, Sang Pangeran. Despite the fact that she has found the man she has long desired, Si Cantik cannot escape the overwhelming fear that he might leave her. Her fears become so pronounced that she goes to the extent of hiding her pregnancy from him, worried that if he knew, he might treat her differently or even abandon her (Kurniawan, 2021: 496). This act of concealment underscores Si Cantik's deep-rooted need for emotional security and her inability to reconcile her desires with her fear of being rejected.

Si Cantik's anxiety is further exacerbated by her repeated questioning of Sang Pangeran about why he desires her in the first place. She seeks constant reassurance to quell her fears of being unloved and unwanted. On one occasion, when she asks him directly why he loves her, Sang Pangeran responds hesitantly, claiming that it is because he loves her. However, Si Cantik, despite receiving his affirmation, is unable to accept it. She persistently questions how it is possible for someone as unattractive as herself to be loved by a man like him, continuously seeking answers to her own doubts and insecurities. As Kurniawan (2021: 505) notes, Si Cantik's repeated ques-

tioning is not merely a reflection of curiosity, but rather an expression of her profound emotional insecurity and fear that the affection she receives may be fleeting.

This persistent need for affirmation and the fear of abandonment that characterizes Si Cantik's behavior can be understood through a psychoanalytic lens, particularly in terms of neurosis. According to Karen Horney (via Feist et al., 2017: 181), individuals experiencing neurotic tendencies often struggle to maintain a sense of connection with others in order to alleviate their anxieties. In the case of Si Cantik, her behavior—especially her constant questioning and need for reassurance—serves as a defense mechanism to alleviate her deep-seated emotional fears. She uses affection as a means of psychological protection, attempting to secure her place in Sang Pangeran's life and ensuring that she remains at the center of his attention.

In psychoanalytic terms, Si Cantik's behavioral patterns can be seen as an attempt to alleviate her inner anxieties about abandonment. By seeking reassurance from Sang Pangeran, she attempts to establish a sense of stability and security in her relationship. This need for validation reflects a broader psychological struggle wherein Si Cantik is unable to achieve emotional independence or self-assurance, relying instead on her partner's affection to affirm her worth and stave off her fears of being left alone. Her insistence on seeking answers to why Sang Pangeran desires her, despite receiving reassurance, exemplifies the complex interplay between affection, insecurity, and the desire for emotional protection.

The phenomenon illustrated in Si Cantik's behavior can be further understood in terms of what is commonly referred to as the "Cinderella Complex," a psychological concept that refers to the tendency to rely on others, particularly a partner, for emotional security and protection. In this regard, Si Cantik's repeated vigil on the veranda waiting for the arrival of her ideal man and her persistent hope for his love reflect this dependence. Even though she is unsure whether he will come, her belief in the promise of a protector compels her to wait each night (Kurniawan, 2021: 491). This psychological dependence on another person for emotional fulfillment weakens Si Cantik's ability to develop a sense of self-reliance and autonomy, just as the Cinderella figure waits passively for a prince to rescue her.

Si Cantik's behavior thus represents a complex dynamic where a woman, despite having achieved her romantic goal of being with a man, continues to struggle with the psychological fear of abandonment. Her dependence on the emotional affirmation she receives from Sang Pangeran highlights the difficulties faced by individuals who struggle to balance their need for connection with their fear of losing that connection. Ultimately, her actions reflect a psychological pattern where affection becomes both a source of comfort and a tool for alleviating anxiety, but one that also underscores her vulnerability and emotional dependence on another person.

Causes of Fear of Independence

Comparing female characters in *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer and *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan, it is revealed that both Annelies and Si Cantik share a fear of independence, the underlying causes and responses differ. Annelies' fear stems from hindered psychological growth due to parenting, while Si Cantik's dependence is rooted in a negative self-concept. However, unlike Annelies, Si Cantik consciously attempts to free herself from this dependency. This struggle not only reflects her vulnerability as an individual but also her deliberate efforts to resist societal expectations related to femininity and relational roles.

The emergence of the fear of independence in women can be attributed to three factors: (1) parental upbringing patterns, (2) personality maturity, and (3) negative self-concept (Zain, 2016: 94–95). Referring to the findings presented in Table 1, the primary causes of Si Cantik's fear of independence in Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka* are the patterns of parental upbringing and her negative self-concept.

Overprotective parenting that intervenes excessively in child's life

Parenting styles significantly influence the development of a child's personality (Dowling, 1989: 82; Anggraini, 2016: 67). In relation to a fear of independence, the feminine influence from the family and childhood experiences often manifests in the subconscious. Girls, in particular, are socialized to rely on others and are rarely encouraged to adopt self-reliance and self-protection (Dowling, 1989: 3). This contrasts with boys, who typically receive special protection from their parents from an early age, reflecting the "different treatment" in parenting practices (Adawiyah, 2021: 74).

The fear of independence exhibited by Si Cantik is closely tied to the conditioning instilled by her parents, particularly Rosinah and her mother. Raised by Rosinah, her mother's maid, Si Cantik was sheltered with an intense level of care. Rosinah, deeply concerned about Si Cantik's well-being, devoted herself to fulfilling the child's needs and shielding her from harm. In *Cantik Itu Luka*, Rosinah's protective nature is illustrated in the following passage

Rosinah had tried to take her to the neighbors' houses, even since she was just a baby in her arms, but no one would take her in, because children would scream and cry all day, and the elderly would soon develop a fever and die two days later (Kurniawan, 2021: 20).

Excessive protection from parents or caregivers, as noted by Dowling (1989: 79), may hinder girls' independence, leaving them reliant on affiliation and protection in adulthood.

Si Cantik faced control from her mother, Dewi Ayu, who wished for an unattractive daughter to spare her from the misfortunes experienced by her older sisters. This aligns with Zaini's (2020) study on the analysis of inner conflicts in *Cantik Itu Luka*, which suggests that the deviant behavior of

Dewi Ayu's children was a result of inadequate parenting. Dewi Ayu's own trauma stemmed from the fact that her three previous daughters had attracted male attention and eventually followed in her footsteps. She did not want her daughters to repeat her own fate—being adored by men (Choir, 2021). Dewi Ayu was devastated when Si Cantik, despite her intended appearance, still managed to attract men—something she had desperately tried to prevent even before the girl was born. This led her to exert even greater control over Si Cantik's life (Kurniawan, 2021: 284). Such dominance fostered Si Cantik's suppressed hostility and anxiety, leaving her “isolated and powerless in a perceived unfriendly world.”

A negative self-concept related to physical appearance

The concept of self is understood as a continuous awareness of experiences related to one's identity, as well as the distinction between oneself and others (Rogers via Burns & Gavin, 1979). Self-concept refers to self-assessment, which ultimately influences one's feelings and behaviors (Rakhmat, 2003). According to Hurlock (2013), self-concept is divided into two categories: the actual self-concept, which is a person's perception of who they are and what they are, and the ideal self-concept, which represents their idealized self in terms of appearance and personality. People with a negative self-concept tend to view themselves unfavorably and feel inferior to others, while those with a positive self-concept assess themselves positively, accepting their true selves. The self-concept can vary between men and women due to societal stereotypes and differential treatment.

Women, in particular, are often subject to negative stereotypes (Dera, 2016: 167). Ideally, both men and women should exhibit self-confidence and independence, yet stereotypes contribute to differences in self-concept between genders (Ismiati, 2018: 34). Men are typically seen as independent individuals who can achieve anything, resulting in a positive self-concept. On the other hand, women often face constraints on their independence and are perceived as limited.

In the case of Si Cantik, her negative self-concept is evident. She is depicted as physically unattractive, and this leads to a low self-opinion, causing her to withdraw from social interactions. Burns & Gavin (1979) argue that individuals with more muscular builds or women with proportional figures tend to receive social approval, which fosters a positive self-concept. In contrast, Killing & Killing (2015) suggest that a child's self-concept is shaped more by societal labels, such as “The Chubby One” or “The Skinny One,” than by their physical appearance. These labels, bestowed in childhood, significantly hinder the development of a positive self-concept later in life.

Si Cantik's poor self-image is compounded by her physical appearance and the avoidance she faces from others, leading her to rarely leave her home. She often gazes at the people passing by, silently wishing for interac-

tion, yet feeling isolated because no one engages with her. This emotional struggle is reflected in the following excerpt from *Cantik Itu Luka*: “Despite all her wonders, she remained an unfortunate and pitiable girl with an unattractive appearance. Rosinah often saw her standing behind the curtain, peeking at the people outside or staring when she had to go out to buy something, as if silently asking to be invited” (Kurniawan, 2021: 21). When Dewi Ayu, Si Cantik’s mother, returned, the house became lively with visitors inquiring about her experiences. However, Si Cantik felt pressured by the attention and chose to lock herself in her room, avoiding contact with her mother’s guests due to the embarrassment of her appearance. Dewi Ayu’s visitors also felt uneasy staying for long, reluctant to see Si Cantik’s appearance if she happened to emerge (Kurniawan, 2021: 488).

Si Cantik is also highly sensitive to any remarks about her physical appearance, especially when they touch on her insecurities. This is demonstrated in the following passage from *Cantik Itu Luka*: “You’ve suddenly turned forty. Soon you’ll be old and wrinkled.” Dewi Ayu chuckled lightly, trying to keep the atmosphere lively at the dinner table. “Like a frog,” Rosinah gestured. “Like a Komodo dragon,” Dewi Ayu added. “Like me,” she said, short and frightening (Kurniawan, 2021: 24).

In this excerpt, Si Cantik takes offense at the playful conversation about aging skin, even though her mother and Rosinah did not intend to insult her. She felt hurt by their comments and quickly retorted that bad skin was like hers. Such incidents contribute to Si Cantik’s fear of independence. The loneliness stemming from her physical appearance and infrequent interactions with others leads her to long for someone to save her. She yearns for the arrival of a “prince charming” or a man who can offer her protection, comfort, and happiness.

Attempts to Escape from the Fear of Independence

Freedom from the trap of the fear of independence cannot be granted by others, especially men, but must be pursued by women themselves. The most effective way to break free from such tendencies is by self-identification and relinquishing all the crutches that are used to maintain a sense of “security” in life (Dowling, 1989: 190).

Identifying with her own strengths and potential

Based on the findings presented in Table 1, it is clear that Si Cantik made significant efforts to free herself from the fear of independence. Her process of self-identification began after the death of Sang Pangeran. Initially, Si Cantik struggled to cope with the loss of Sang Pangeran or Krisan, as evidenced when she attended the funeral. Her grief was profound, and she seemed to mourn more deeply than Adinda, Krisan’s mother, who was closer to him.

After a period of mourning, Si Cantik began to grow stronger. This shift is evident in a conversation between her and her siblings, where she men-

tions that her mother had recently returned home, but left again before Krisan's passing (Kurniawan, 2021: 499). It was at this point that Si Cantik began the process of self-identification. She realized that she could no longer remain close to Sang Pangeran or rely on him as the figure she once considered her "savior."

As time passed, Si Cantik gradually came to terms with the loss and began to forget about Sang Pangeran. She was able to continue her solitary life without depending on the man she had once relied upon for salvation. To alleviate her loneliness, Si Cantik began visiting the homes of her other siblings, and they reciprocated. This is illustrated in the novel *Cantik Itu Luka* with the following excerpt: "After that, they lived in their respective homes, continuing their quiet lives. To comfort themselves, they would always visit each other" (Kurniawan, 2021: 499). Despite the solitude, the emotional support from her siblings helped her to cope.

Ultimately, Si Cantik managed to live her life independently, without the presence of the man she once viewed as her savior. She continued this way throughout her old age. Despite gossip and mockery from people in her neighborhood, who referred to Si Cantik and her siblings as a group of widows, she remained unaffected. She and her siblings were content with their lives and shared a deep bond of love (Kurniawan, 2021: 499).

This emotional journey of Si Cantik can be compared to the *Cinderella Complex* as described by Hargita and Nurhadi (2023) in their analysis of Annelies Mellema in *Bumi Manusia*. In their study, Annelies struggles to break free from her dependence on men. The further she is from the male figure she hopes for, the more she suffers, both physically and psychologically. Unlike Annelies, Si Cantik manages to free herself from this dependence, although her journey is not without difficulty. Si Cantik demonstrates remarkable emotional resilience by maintaining her mental and emotional well-being, even in isolation.

The key difference between Si Cantik and Annelies lies in Si Cantik's ability to overcome loss and find happiness in solitude, building healthier relationships with her siblings in the process. While Annelies remains trapped in her dependence on a man, Si Cantik is able to grow and find fulfillment without relying on the male figure that once dominated her life. Si Cantik's journey highlights the importance of self-acceptance and how an individual can cultivate emotional independence, even when faced with societal pressure.

Thus, Si Cantik's journey in *Cantik Itu Luka* reflects essential themes of freedom and inner strength, showing how one can overcome grief and how family relationships can serve as crucial emotional support in the healing process. The story conveys a profound message about the importance of letting go of dependency on others to find true happiness and a more independent life.

Respecting herself while accepting her own weakness

In addition to self-identification, Si Cantik's efforts to free herself from the Cinderella Complex in *Cantik Itu Luka* also involved learning to value herself and accepting her flaws. After the death of Sang Pangeran, Si Cantik, who had made peace with herself and her circumstances, began venturing outside her home. She stopped worrying about others' opinions of her appearance. Si Cantik found happiness in her own life and let go of her past misfortunes. Women like her, as described by Dowling (1989: 18), are known as "courageously vulnerable."

The following excerpt demonstrates Si Cantik's transformation: Even Si Cantik, since her first appearance at the funeral, began to gather the courage to leave her home and visit her siblings. She no longer cared about others' views. She wore long dresses, and fabric that nearly covered her face. They enjoyed their life this way, trying to forget the misfortunes they had suffered. They loved each other and found happiness in that love (Kurniawan, 2021: 499).

This quote shows that Si Cantik successfully freed herself from the Cinderella Complex and the fear of independence. After being abandoned by Sang Pangeran, she was able to live her life by embracing self-identity and self-worth. According to Dowling (1989: 191), women who make an effort to break free from this tendency take every step to stand firm in the face of challenges they can handle, love themselves, and maintain realism, which ultimately leads them to a happy life.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion outlined earlier, several key points can be summarized. First, the variations of the fear of independence experienced by the character Si Cantik in the novel *Cantik Itu Luka* include (1) yearning for a partner who can protect, comfort, and make her happy, (2) the desire for constant attention, and (3) experiencing anxiety about living alone and the fear of being abandoned by a partner. Second, the causes of this fear of independence are (1) overprotective parenting that excessively intervenes in a child's life and (2) a negative self-concept regarding one's physical appearance. Finally, the tendency of the fear of independence experienced by Si Cantik drove her to engage in a continuous "romantic" relationship with the man she longed for. It was only after the man who was considered to provide psychological protection passed away that Si Cantik slowly began to gain control over her own fears and gradually opened up to the outside world.

The research is expected to make a valuable contribution to the field of literary research, particularly in expanding our understanding of characters and their personalities in literary works, focusing on the psychological aspects experienced by female characters. Furthermore, the study's findings are anticipated to enhance the logic of literary interpretation for readers,

especially in analyzing one of its intrinsic elements in-depth, thereby revealing specific values within the work that correlate with societal realities. To achieve a more comprehensive perspective in literary research in this context, the researcher suggests that future researchers explore the individual styles of authors in expressing the fears experienced by female characters.

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