



Myths and Gender Relations in Short Stories *When Mothers Come* by Dwi Ratih Ramadhany

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ABSTRACT

The short story "When Mother Comes" by Dwi Ratih Ramadhany presents the figure of a mother from three generations who has to grapple with dilemmas in her life, which then shows the gender relations between the characters. Dwi Ratih Ramadhany who is a female writer born in Sampang, Madura who raises many female themes in her work. The short story "When Mother Comes" is told through a simple plot through the arrival of a mother to her child's house, when her child gives birth. This study concludes that there are a number of myths that the Mother character brings as the old generation, to the I, as the new generation. These myths include the myth of 'fighting the mother makes the child go to hell', the myth of 'the baby's urine is put in a jug', the myth 'the breast is infested with jinn and demons so that the child does not want to breastfeed'. Meanwhile, the gender relations that emerge in this short story are divided into two, the first is that perpetuates gender stereotypes, namely, associating domestic tasks with female characters, demonizing female characters as grumpy monsters, positioning male characters as more rational parties in the midst of the absence of these characters in family debates, while the second is breaking gender stereotypes seen in the "I" character who has agency and critical power to question the gender stereotypes imposed on her.

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INTRODUCTION

Women have always been an interesting subject in Indonesian literature. Several Indonesian women writers are considered to have made breakthroughs through their phenomenal works (Rusli et al., 2022). One of them is Ayu Utami through several of her works such as *Saman*, and *Larung*. In the two novels written by Ayu Utami, strong women are shown who want to break the stereotype of weak and obedient women.

Another name that is quite famous is Oka Rusmini with some of his works that depict the breakdown of Balinese women against the customs that surround them. Indonesian literature has produced quite a lot of prominent women writers who raise women's themes. One of the new generation writers who also raises a lot of female themes is Dwi Ratih Ramadhany who is a writer born in Sampang, Madura in 1993. Her short story published and translated on the Intersastra page raises the complicated theme of a mother's relationship with her daughter. The short story titled "When Mother Comes" skins the myths about heaven on the soles of Mother's feet that trap daughters that are passed down from generation to generation. This short story is interesting to research further because it raises the complicated relationship between Mother-daughter relationship, which can then further reveal the gender relationship between the characters in the story. This short story centers on the arrival of the protagonist's mother. Through the arrival of the Mother character, the main character's relationship with her mother and grandmother is revealed. In this story written by Dwi Ratih, male characters are also displayed, namely the father and husband of the protagonist. However, the roles and attitudes displayed by male characters are very different from the female characters in the story. Female characters are shown dominantly in the story, while male characters are shown absent. This sparks further questions about the gender relations shown in the story. Furthermore, this research also seeks to dissect a myth used by the author to present the story, namely the myth of "paradise on the soles of mother's feet". The myth of "paradise on the mother's feet" has trapped the female characters in the story to creating a toxic relationship between the mother character and her daughter.

Short stories are part of the narrative structure. According to Eriyanto (2013), narratives are useful for providing moral guidance and direction to the community, as well as being useful for maintaining tradition and affirming their identity. A narrative can shape a reality that is believed in society, which in turn can create stereotypes. Eriyanto (2013) also emphasizes the importance of the role of characters in the story. "Storytellers need characters who can represent the content of the message, ranging from hero characters (good people), villains to characters who help heroes and villains." According to Eriyanto, the characterization will determine the message that the story maker wants to convey, in this case the author. Every action in the character will form a certain meaning. The consequences of the actions of each character will also affect other characters. Therefore, it is important to see how the main character in the short story relates to the other characters in the story, especially the character of the mother from three generations to show the gender relationship between the characters.

Research on gender, driven by the women's movement for gender equality. This is because most gender orders around the world have been detrimental to women and privileged men (Connell, 2009). The current pattern is not only a limitation for women, but there is inequality. Most churches and mosques are run exclusively by men. Most of the major institutions are led by men, most of science and technology are controlled by

men. In many countries, fewer women can read. For example, in India, the literacy rate of men reaches 73 percent, while women only 48 percent, in Nigeria, 78 percent of men can read, while women only 60 percent. On a world scale, two-thirds of illiterate people are women (Connell, 2009,).

Gender is seen as a cultural concept used to distinguish the roles, behaviors, mentalities and emotional characteristics between men and women that develop in society." Gender stereotypes are related to impressions and beliefs about appropriate behavior for men and women. Stereotypes are related to the image of members of the gender category (Rokhmansyah, 2016). Gender according to (Rahmawati, 2017) has the meaning of a social construct or form that is actually not innate so that it can be formed or changed based on place, time/era, ethnicity/race/nation, culture, social status, understanding religion, state, political ideology, law, and economics. Gender is socially and culturally formed, so it does not apply forever and can vary depending on time and place. "The formation of gender differences is due to many things, including: formed, socialized, strengthened and even constructed socio-culturally through religious and state teachings." (Wang et al., 2016).

Through the above elaboration, this study seeks to examine the relationships between the characters in the story, how these relationships show gender relations to answer the question of whether this short story perpetuates the gender stereotype or breaks the stereotype. The short story "*When Mother Comes*" by Dwi Ratih Ramadhany tells the unique relationship of the story of a mother from three generations, who turns out to pass on the demands and pressures to their respective daughters. The myth that heaven is at the feet of the mother, and that a child will go to hell if she disobeys her mother, makes the girls forced to accept pressure and demands from their mothers. A mother who is glorified in this short story is a source of suffering and sadness for her daughter. Three women from three generations perform their respective roles in the story, which then shows the gender relations between the three as well as the male characters present in the story.

Some previous studies that examined gender issues in Indonesian short stories were conducted by Amirul Nisa (2018). His research is entitled "Balinese Patriarchal Culture According to Ni Komang Ariani's Perspective in a Collection of Short Stories Bukan Permaisuri". The researcher examined 12 short stories by Ni Komang Ariani. The researchers concluded that the workload received by women was more, while the role was minor in the public sphere. He also concluded that there is a stereotype formed by society, violence in the form of psychic in the form of pressure on the condition of the male family. The resistance given by the characters in the short story dianatrnya reduces respect for the husband, separates, divorces and rejects marriage. Another previous research is Anggraheni, Novi (2013) entitled "The Image of Women in the Collection of Short Stories Bukan Permaisuri by Ni Komang Ariani and Suggestions for Its Implementation in Teaching Literature in High School" The researcher concluded that there were six images of women from the positive side that were quite dominant in

the nine short stories analyzed. The six images are the image of women who are dexterous in their work, the image of a clean woman, the image of a patient woman, the image of a woman with sincerity, the image of a woman who is virtuous, and the image of a woman who is smart in all fields. The third previous research was entitled "Professive and Counterfeminist Figures of Hanah in the Short Story of *Telapak Kaki yang Menyimpan Surga* by Ni Komang Ariani conducted by Irmawati et al. (2017). The three researchers conducted research on a short story entitled "*Telapak Kaki yang Menyimpan Surga*" by Ni Komang Ariani in the *Jawa Pos* newspaper Edition on September 18, 2016. This research aims to obtain a description of the profeminist and counterfeminist figures of Hanah. The three researchers concluded that Hanah's character belongs to the counterfeminist group because she obeys whatever her husband says more than she does outside the home. But it is also undeniable that Hanah has a desire to go to school and do activities outside the home because of her husband's request to practice polygamy. The three studies mentioned above seek to reveal gender relations in short stories by female authors, as is the case with this study.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative research methods. Bryman (2012) defines qualitative research as a strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than counts in collecting and analyzing data. Meanwhile, Sandelowoski (2004) defines qualitative research methods as an umbrella term for a series of attitudes and strategies to conduct investigations aimed at discovering how humans understand, experience, interpret, and create a social world (Suyadnya & Kholifah, 2018). This is supported by the opinion of Kracauer (1952) who stated that quantitative text analysis ignores a number of things in the text that can be done through qualitative text analysis. According to him, the pattern and integrity of the text cannot be obtained by calculating and measuring what is visible, but by interpreting the meanings of the connotations. It focuses on the study of the hidden meanings of a text. In textual analysis, researchers do not try to find "correct interpretations", but interpretations that are convincing and provide trust based on research arguments built through research theses. Unlike quantitative research that emphasizes statistical correctness, in textual research, researchers are not required to perform correct interpretations. Assessment of this type of research is not a standard, because this type of research is not a research that can be standardized (Ida, 2016). The steps taken in this study include: 1) Close reading of the text of the short story "When Mother Comes", 2) Tracing the socio-cultural background of the short story writer "When Mother Comes", 3) Conducting a study of the plot, the use of sentences, vocabulary in the short story that reflects myths and gender relations and 4) Conducting interpretation and discussion using gender theories to see the gender representation displayed in the short story.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The short story *When Mother Comes* has a simple plot, but presents a number of interesting myths to be examined further. A number of myths are generally presented by the Mother character as a character who comes from the old generation, and are forced on the "I" character who comes from the new generation. The "I" character shows a critical attitude in questioning and rationalizing the myths imposed by the Ibu character. The following are some myths found in the short story *When Mother Comes*.

Table 1. Myths in the Short Story *When Mother Comes*

No	Myth	The "I" Character's Critical Attitude towards Myths
1	Heaven is under the feet of the mother. Going against the mother's orders will make the child go to hell.	The mother figure passes on the trauma and burden of going to hell from generation to generation.
2	The baby's placenta is placed in a jug "Mother brought herbal medicine and param. Have you got a jug for the placenta? Where did you buy it?" asked Mother towards evening	The "I" character questions Mother's attitude of enforcing irrational myths.
3	On the fifth day, Mother came and said that my breasts were possessed by demons and devils. That was why my child did not want to breastfeed.	The "I" character fights back by not caring and not paying attention to the unreasonable myths told by his mother.

In addition to containing a number of myths as explained above, this short story also displays gender relations between its characters. What is quite prominent is the relationship between three women from three generations, namely the characters of I-the Mother- the Grandmother, which seems to present a traumatic relationship, because each woman apparently inherits her problems to the next generation.

Table 2. Gender Relations in the Short Story *When Mother Comes*

No	Perpetuating Gender Stereotypes	Breaking Down Gender Stereotypes
1	Assigning domestic tasks only to female characters. Associating domestic tasks to female characters.	
2	Demonizing female characters as angry characters	The "I" character always shows critical thinking in questioning things that he considers unreasonable.
3.	Positioning male characters as the more rational party amidst the absence of such characters in family debates.	

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- 4 Neutralize the male characters who are mostly silent and do not help with the domestic tasks assigned to female characters.
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Discussion

Even though it uses a very simple plot, the short story *When Mother Comes* also contains a number of fundamental problems. The arrival of the mother character to the house of her daughter who has just given birth shows the complicated relationship between two blood-related women who come from two different generations. The relationship between mother and child, which is often seen as a relationship full of love, actually contains traumatic relationships that are passed on from mother to child. The following is one of the first quotes taken from the short story *When Mother Comes*.

“When Mom said she would come earlier than planned, I suddenly remembered that I hadn’t scrubbed the bathroom, ironed my clothes, wiped the windows, changed the sheets, and pulled out the weeds in the front yard” (Ramadhany, 2020).

The quote above shows that the “I” character associates her mother’s presence with domestic tasks, namely ‘scrubbing the bathroom’, ‘ironing clothes’, ‘wiping the window glass’, ‘changing the sheets’, ‘pulling weeds in the yard’. Their positions as women mean that the “I” character must do exactly the same as her mother does. The “I” character does not mention her husband in these various domestic activities. The “I” character also shows complaints and feelings of discomfort, because the presence of her mother will bring excessive demands and burdens on her. This burden is not imposed on the husband character, who is considered to be free from these domestic tasks. Here there is an unequal gender relationship between the female and male characters. Domestic tasks are only imposed on women, not men. In the next section, the “I” character shows contrasting emotions, in one she is happy with the arrival of her mother, which reminds her of the comfort she felt as a child, receiving protection and affection from her mother, as seen in the quote below:

“I seemed to transform into a very happy little girl because I could smell my mother’s scent again, then I turned into a scared child who hid behind the door and hoped that my mother wouldn’t find me” (Ramadhany, 2020)

The relationship between the character I and her mother is shown again in the quote above. It shows a ‘love-hate’ relationship. The relationship of hate and love between a daughter and her mother. If related to the first paragraph of this short story, it seems that there is pressure received by the daughter from her mother.

There are many demands given by the mother to her daughter, so that she does not have the freedom to be herself. The mother's character is also depicted as full of demands that are coercive, so that no one, neither the character I nor her husband, can deny it.

"I pointed to the small cupboard where I kept my baby's necessities. All the clothes had been washed. Clean. Fragrant. Neatly arranged. I wanted to ask why I couldn't use the washing machine? But I didn't tell my mother that I washed them in the washing machine, using a special setting for baby clothes. More practical" (Ramadhany, 2020)

The "I" character tries to raise critical questions on her mother's orders. She has proven for herself that 'washing with a washing machine' also produces the same good quality as 'washing by hand'. She wants to ask her mother about the advice given. This shows that my character has agency because she is able to raise critical questions on things she considers unreasonable. However, she negotiates and compromises with her mother's advice, to avoid the conflict that occurs.

Behind the critical questions raised by the character I, he is burdened with the myth of 'heaven under the soles of mother's feet' and 'go to hell if you argue with mother'. This is what causes an inner conflict within the character I, between obeying or criticizing the unreasonable demands of his mother. The quote below shows the dilemma felt by the character I.

"My stomach hurts, but I'm afraid of going to hell if I die in labor because I disobey my mother" (Ramadhany, 2020)

Once again, the mother character is shown as someone who likes to scold, pressure, and does not understand the situation of her daughter. The character "I" experiences inner turmoil and a dilemma between 'obeying' or not to her mother. The mother character is sacred as the party that determines the fate of her daughter in terms of heaven and hell. The pressure that the mother character gives to her daughter is also shown by other sentences in the short story, including those seen below:

"Every day, my mother dictates what I should do to my baby, even to myself. But she doesn't scold me like she used to whenever I make the slightest mistake. Usually, she would say 'You should have obeyed me' if I was wrong, or 'I always know what's good for the children' if I disobeyed, or 'You'll bear the consequences if you don't listen to me' if I dared to disobey. However, not this time. I started to suspect. Was my mother tired of scolding me?" (Ramadhany, 2020)

The mother character is shown as a character who continues to pressure her daughter. The mother character scolds her daughter every time she makes a small mistake, even trying to monopolize the truth by saying 'Mother always knows what is good for the children'. This makes the character "I" always in a position of fear of being blamed by her mother.

Such representations make the mother figure depicted antagonistically or demonized. Meanwhile, the two absent male figures, who do not show their roles in helping women's domestic tasks, are not depicted antagonistically, and are not blamed for their absence. On the contrary, the father and husband figures are shown as calming or rational, not emotional like the female figures in this short story. The rational attitude of the male figure is seen in the quote below.

"However, according to my husband, I don't need to argue with my mother. Especially because we know, Mother will also say that it has been done for generations" (Ramadhany, 2020)

The husband is considered to be the more rational party, which makes the "I" character listen and carry out his opinions. The other male character, the Father character, appears submissive and afraid of the Mother character, while also presenting the Mother character as a frightening monster with her anger.

"Your father took medicine because he was afraid of being scolded, not because he was afraid of getting sick. Father chimed in, being scolded by mother can also cause pain. I laughed" (Ramadhany, 2020)

Meanwhile, the character "I" shows agency as a character who likes to ask questions, questioning things that he considers unreasonable. The following are some questions asked by the character "I" and the critical power function that she shows, as seen in the quote below:

"I don't understand what the jug has to do with its owner's life story and why it makes Mother worried" (Ramadhany, 2020)

The ending of the story then shows that the mother character only continues the pressure she received from her own mother. She continues the demanding and oppressive behavior towards her daughter.

"But I knew that Mom wasn't telling the truth. From Dad I finally found out the truth. After only two days here, Grandma called Mom several times and asked her to come home soon" (Ramadhany, 2020)

Behind the demanding attitude of Mother, she also received great pressure from her own mother. The story of this short story is framed by a myth that 'a child who does not obey his mother will go to hell'. And the oppressive and demanding attitude has been passed down through two generations. The character of Mother and the character of I, are powerless to reject the pressure and demands given by their mother, because they are threatened by the fear of going to hell if they do not obey their mother.

"Your grandmother is starting to get senile. Your mother always tries to be patient and diligent in taking care of her, but your grandmother never seems satisfied. Even though there are many of your mother's relatives there, as well as maids. And you know yourself your mother is very afraid of losing the heaven under your grandmother's feet," explained Father when Mother was lingering without the sound of running water in the bathroom. Either contemplating. Or crying" (Ramadhany, 2020)

"Grandma wants Mother to come home now or she will kill herself," her last words seemed to get stuck in her throat, causing her to cry again without making a sound" (Ramadhany, 2020)

The quote above shows that a mother does not stop putting pressure and demands on her daughter even when her daughter is an adult and married. The figure of a grandmother who is senile, still terrorizes her daughter to obey her. Here is also shown the relationship between mother and daughter which is toxic and causes wounds to the daughter's psyche. However, later, the violence committed by the mother by her daughter, cannot be fought by the daughter through a critical attitude because it is blocked by a myth 'a child will go to hell if he does not obey his mother'.

At the end of the story, the mother character is shown to regret what she did to her daughter, through the dialogue below:

"Anti, have you ever been disappointed in Mother?"

I turned my head. Then nodded hesitantly.

"Anti, are you being too demanding?"

I was stunned. Mother stared at me.

"Anti, have you disobeyed and will you go to hell?"

Here the Mother figure is seen loosening her arrogance, which previously she thought that she could monopolize the truth. Humbly, she asks her daughter, the mistakes she made in the past, while realizing that what she did was a legacy of what her mother did to her. But on the other hand, she is still worried, that all the mental

torture she experienced, caused by her own mother, is not enough to qualify her to enter heaven.

CONCLUSION

The short story *When Mother Comes* by Dwi Ratih Ramadhany presents a number of myths brought by the Mother character as the old generation, to the "I" character, as the new generation. These myths include the myth of 'fighting Mother will make the child go to hell', the myth of 'the baby's placenta is placed in a jug', the myth of 'breasts are infested with jinns and demons so that the child does not want to breastfeed'. The "I" character tries to question and criticize the myths brought by the Mother character. Meanwhile, the gender relations that emerge in this short story are divided into two, the first is perpetuating gender stereotypes, namely, associating domestic tasks with female characters, and freeing men from these tasks, demonizing female characters as angry monsters, positioning male characters as the more rational party amidst the absence of these characters in family debates, while the second is breaking down gender stereotypes seen in the "I" character who has the agency and critical power to question gender stereotypes imposed on her.

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