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Female Characters in Short Stories Written by Female Prisoners

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Abstract. It is interesting when women life stories are written by the women who lived behind bars. A compilation of 32 short stories under the title "Titik Nadir Penantian" (The Nadir Point of Waiting) illustrated the twists and turns of women lives from various perspectives. Different themes of women's life in the stories depict the true experiences and life journeys of the writers. There are twelve themes of women lives found: (1) lost love, (2) drug abuse, (3) drug substance victim, (4) husband betrayal, (5) parent divorce adversity, (6) negative stigma of fatherless child, (7) women patience in facing problems, (8) hope for beautiful love, (9) hopes and dreams of a child, (10) family affection, (11) longing for family, and (12) regrets. All stories are told from the first-person point of view; the writer poses as a person directly involved in the story. With restricted freedom, writing short stories became a medium for these women to express themselves, their experiences and their feeling, thus easing their burden. The inner feeling of women depicted in the short stories contains the feeling of (1) sadness due to tragedies, conflict, serious problems, bitterness of life, frustration, betrayal, dishonesty, and possessiveness, (2) happiness shown from joyfulness, enjoyment, high spirit, sharing, and romance, (3) sincerity illustrated from the attitude of commitment, awareness, wisdom, strength, and religiousness, and (4) responsibility, shown from the attitude of independence, firmness, spirit to improve, resilience, and openness.

Keywords: female characters, women life themes, short story themes, short story

INTRODUCTION

Literary works can be both imaginative and yet depicting a true-life story. In its development, literary works have their own highs and lows, from the themes used, the characters and their characterization, as well as from the development of the conflict. All of this illustrates the development in the community, especially in the dynamics of increasingly globalized society [1]. This is partly due to the advancement of technology which allows the introduction of new values, among which is cultural values.

Literary works do not only bring enjoyment and pleasure during the time of reading, but it also brings useful lessons for the readers in the forms of new knowledge and experiences. This is based on the popular principle of literary works *docere et utile* [2]. Writers write stories to entertain, share experiences, educate readers through the values of life depicted in the stories [3]. The lessons from the story include all aspects of human life, such as moral values, social values, religious values, cultural values, and intellectual values. Therefore, literary works can influence readers' and society's patterns of thoughts in dealing with and acting upon any issue.

Literary works are commonly used by teachers to sensitize students, shaping their manners and encourage tolerance among them [4]. Through the characters and conflicts found in literary works, students can learn some lessons, experience and knowledge. Besides, reading improves students' literacy skill, which is encouraged and fostered among all level of education. Students can appreciate the information that they read and communicate their thoughts and feeling.

Short stories are the results of the writer's imagination, stemming from real-life experiences as part of the community. This is made possible after the reconstruction of characters' names and settings and written using beautiful and compelling words. Therefore, the prose is a form of real-life reflection of people, which is full of problems and conflicts. This is also visible from the local literary works which depict people's lives along with their real condition, such as the tradition, place, culinary, activities, and so on [5]. For example, Siti Nurhayati novel written by Marah Rizli, which reflects the life of the society in its era, which was characterized by arranged marriage for women, a common occurrence among the society then. In addition, the novel of Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk

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development in the community, especially in the dynamic of increasingly globalized society [1]. This is partly due to the advancement of technology which allows the introduction of new values, among which is cultural values.

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written by Ahmad Tohari and other poets and writers such as Linus Suryadi, Umar Kayam, among others.

That is also the case with the events in the short stories written by the female inmates of the Women Penitentiary of Malang. They came from various social, education, economy, cultural and conflict backgrounds which brought them there. Considering their background, their psychological aspect heavily characterized the literary works they produced, such as the characters and characterization, place and psychological settings, conflicts that propel the plot, as well as the lesson of the story. However, one similarity of these writers is their presence behind bars due to legal problems. Therefore, their short stories are fascinating to be researched, such as how they expressed their feelings, thoughts, hopes, dreams, and emotion through the written medium in the form of a story. In addition, how is the correlation between their life experiences and the short story that they produced?

Therefore, this study seeks to describe (1) various themes of women lives in the compilation of short story "Titik Nadir Penantian" (The Nadir Point of Waiting), (2) the women characterizations in the different life themes of the women in the "Titik Nadir Penantian" (The Nadir Point of Waiting), and (3) the relevance of themes used which was based on the writers' real-life and imagination.

METHOD

This study is a follow up on the author's community service program when giving training on short story writing for the female inmates in the Women Penitentiary of Malang. The training was given to the inmates who, according to the staff, enjoyed reading books. This was shown by the records of book loan from the penitentiary library. From 43 participants of the training, 32 of them produced short stories. Those who opted not to write did so because they did not feel ready and were lacking in confidence. They expressed willingness to try in another opportunity.

This study is descriptive qualitative in nature. The data is in the form of stories which depict women characters, as well as the short story writers' statements about the relevance between their stories and their life experience. The source of data is the short stories and their writers. The data collection technique is text exploration to illustrate the characterization of the women characters and observation of participation and supervision during the writing process. The data analysis technique uses content analysis on the short stories and confirming the results to the writer of the story about the themes.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A. The Themes of Women Lives in the Compilation of Short Story "Titik Nadir Penantian"

Theme is something that gives colour to the whole story in a literary work. The theme of a story can be driven by the characters in the story, the plot of the story, as well as the conflict of the story. The theme can be the main idea of the writers, which stems from their view of and attitude towards life, as well as from the various problems that they have faced. There are a number of themes from the compilation of short story "Titik Nadir Penantian." The writers who came from various background of education, social, economy and culture gave their unique influence to the stories. The subjective condition of the writers who, at the time of writing, were inmates in the penitentiary, also influence the colour and atmosphere of the stories. They were physically behind bars, but their feeling and imagination can still be put into beautiful fiction works.

There are twelve themes of women lives identified from the compilation of short stories, they are; (1) lost love, (2) drug abuse, (3) drug mobster victim, (4) husband betrayal, (5) parent divorce adversity, (6) negative stigma of fatherless child, (7) women patience in facing problems, (8) hope for beautiful love, (9) hopes and dreams of a child, (10) family affection, (11) longing for family, and (12) regrets.

Table 1. The themes found in the short stories written by female inmates

| No. | Themes on Women Lives | No. of Stories |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 1. | Lost love | 3 |
| 2. | Drug abuse | 2 |
| 3. | Drug mobster victim | 1 |
| 4. | Husband betrayal | 2 |
| 5. | Parent divorce adversity | 4 |
| 6. | The negative stigma of fatherless child | 2 |
| 7. | Women patience in facing problems | 4 |
| 8. | Hope for a beautiful love | 4 |
| 9. | Hopes and dreams of a child | 2 |
| 10. | Family affection | 4 |
| 11. | Longing for family | 2 |
| 12. | Regrets | 2 |

Literary works that are about life can be a good lesson for readers. For example, in the theme of "drug mobster victim," there was a story of a female immigrant worker who was about to go back home to Indonesia. Her innocence was used by her friend from the same country who asked her help to bring a package home. Someone would take the

package in the airport as she arrived, she was told. When the border security checked her baggage in the airport, it was found that the package contained illegal drug and she could not explain to the authority about the owner of the package. The happiness of being home was quickly turned into an arduous legal process. The phenomenon of literary works depicting illegal drugs and drug abuse, as well as the social aspects related to women was also discussed by Prowse [6]. Women are vulnerable to problems that they are unaware of. Their innocence and empathy to others often become an easy prey for criminal actions. Literary works can be a medium for those women to express their voice to fight for their legal and social rights, as well as to protect themselves from the legal problems for the criminal actions that they did not do. This is exactly what another woman from Latin America did as reported in a paper discussing about Delmira Agustini from Uruguay [7].

B. Women Characterization in the Compilation of Short Story “Titik Nadir Penantian”

A character can be defined as a person’s attitude and personality, which is shown at all times. One’s character propels their mind and feeling to act upon the problem at hand. Lickona identified and classified the process of characterization into three sections; *Moral Knowing, Moral Feeling, dan Moral Action*. Each of the phase moves simultaneously [8]. One’s character began to take shape from the formation process, which happened gradually from the simple one to the more complex ones. Then, these processes strengthen the emotional aspect which moves a person to behave and act, until finally, it became a habit.

The real character of a person is visible especially when they face a pressing and difficult problem, for example, when a person is told to fail an examination or work interview, left by the person they love, punished for a crime they did not do, and so on. In that condition, whether they would express their sadness, failure, and problems in a wise way or in anger or brutal actions, the person’s mentality is at work here.

The women characterization in the characters depicted in the short stories can be classified into 13 personalities; they are (1) spirited, (2) defensive, (3) resilient, (4) able to rise (5) resistant, (6) patient, (7) sincere, (8) fighter, (9) tough, (10) independent, (11) responsible, (12) positive thinking, and (13) grateful.

The women characters in the short stories are depicted as the patient, responsible, fighter, or showing attitude of sympathy and empathy. These characters are generally more acceptable by readers as they can inject some spirits and offer some lessons for them. On the other hand, a character that

is selfish and are opposing the current norms in society are not as easily accepted by the readers [9].

Table 2. Characterization of the women in the short stories written by female inmates

| No. | Women Characters | Situational contexts and events in the stories |
|-----|-------------------|--|
| 1. | Spirited | The spirit to go on living after parents divorce |
| 2. | Defensive | Keeping holding on among adversities |
| 3. | Resilient | Trying to live parents’ hope and dreams |
| 4. | Able to rise | Rising up from the downfall of drug abuse |
| 5. | Resistant | Resisting the heavy pressure of life |
| 6. | Patient | Patience over insults and negative stigma |
| 7. | Sincere | Sincere and content in facing their fate |
| 8. | Fighter | Fighting for their dreams for a better life |
| 9. | Tough | Being tough in dealing with problems in life |
| 10. | Independent | Do not rely financially on the husband's earning |
| 11. | Responsible | Being responsible for the choices made, making parents happy |
| 12. | Positive thinking | There is a silver lining in all happenings, and all are destined by God. |
| 13. | Grateful | Being grateful, as God still love us. |

Most of the main characters in the short stories are women. Besides, the title also contains female names or female genders, such as in the title of Dyla, the story of Nisya, Shitta, Rnafa, True Story of Agatha, Ocean of love for Ratih, Poor Widuri, Women with soot, An angel and three winged angels. This is an interesting occurrence as writing is a medium for expressing the writer’s thoughts. Moreover, as these stories are written by female inmates, they certainly used the opportunity for expressing their thoughts and feelings. By writing, these troubled inmates could ease their pain and suffering [10].

The stories they wrote maybe the personal experience, future hope, their longing for their family, or the stories of the people they care about. As suggested by Derbyshire the writer’s reflection is an inseparable part in prose, which is in line with the written stories, although she classified female poets as a worker in poem composition [11].

C. The relevance of Themes with The Writers' Personal Experience and Imagination

The short stories written by the inmates in this compilation are very close to their lives. During the writing supervision process, they indirectly conveyed the background of the stories that they

wrote. From the 32 stories, made 74% (23 short stories), stemmed from the true stories experienced by the writers. As for the other 9 stories, they were made based on the life stories of the people they know or pure imagination.

The themes close to the writers' life were then

Table 3. The relevance of story themes and real-life story of the writers

| No. | Title | Story |
|-----|---|--|
| 1. | Narapita | An immigrant worker fell victim to a drug mobster during her flight home to Indonesia as she brought a package from her friend containing illegal drugs. |
| 2. | Dyla | A fatherless family that was constantly judged by other people, a story of patience, independence and struggle. |
| 3. | <i>Cintaku Hampir Membubuhku</i> (A love that kills) | The true colour of the husband, who was rough, full of suspicion, and overprotective towards the wife, was found only after marriage. |
| 4. | <i>Terpesona di Pilgrim</i> (mesmerized in the pilgrim) | A love story between nations (Indonesia and Turki), a hope for love to be true |
| 5. | <i>Pupus</i> (disappear) | A love that disappears due to an unfortunate event |
| 6. | True Story of Agatha | The trials of life with a happy ending |
| 7. | <i>Kisah Nisya</i> (the story of Nisya) | The love story of high school students |
| 8. | <i>Senja untuk Jendra</i> (Twilight for Jendra) | A woman who was devastated by divorce fought her way to rise up |
| 9. | <i>Widuri Malang</i> (Poor Widuri) | A wife who fought to free her husband from drug abuse and drug mobster |
| 10. | Hikmah di Balik Jeruji Besi (The wisdom of being behind bars) | Some pearls of wisdom obtained upon living a life behind bars due to embezzlement |
| 11. | <i>Stikom Seputaran Waktu</i> (Stikom around the time) | The picture of a life behind bars with all of the twists and turns experienced by inmates of corruption cases. |
| 12. | <i>Derak sayap-sayap Patah</i> (The crakle of broken wings) | The frustration of life behind bars, in which time feels elongated |
| 13. | <i>Takdir di Titik Nadir</i> (The fate in nadir point) | The longing for the family, which is shifted to a grateful feeling for having a caring family |
| 14. | <i>Bidadari dan Tiga Malaikat Bersayap</i> (An angel with three winged angels) | The heart-wrenching meeting between mother and daughter in the courtroom which strengthens their hearts to do time behind bars |
| 15. | <i>Pertemuan Senin, Rabu, Jumat</i> (the meeting on Monday, Wednesday and Friday) | A waitress who fell in love to a customer who came at a certain fixed schedule, but was never expressed |
| 16. | <i>Perempuan Berjelaga</i> (women with soot) | The story of a girl who lived alone with her grandmother due to being abandoned by her parents. |
| 17. | <i>Air Mata Penyesalan</i> (Tears of regret) | Regret over a decision that brought devastation |
| 18. | <i>Cinta Terlarang</i> (forbidden love) | The dilemma of a love that was mainly moved by lust and money |
| 20. | Shitta | The motivation for easy money |
| 21. | Renafta | The dilemma between career and single life versus marriage |
| 22. | <i>Demi Mereka yang Kusayang</i> (For those I love) | The struggle of becoming a wife in a marriage arranged for financial reasons |
| 23. | <i>Kebahagiaan yang Tak Abadi</i> (un-eternal love) | The suffering of a wife due to a cheating husband |

developed into stories. In order to develop the stories into an interesting fiction, the writers need to choose certain dictions to narrate the plots and dialog among the characters. Then, the writers need patience and enthusiasm to finish their stories. However, the short stories were written by these beginners in writing still needed some editing, both the linguistic and structural aspects.

The stories written behind bars about the life stories of the writers will put them closer to the readers, such as in the story "Stikom around the time." In the story, the writer introduced herself, showed her place (cell block) along with all its occupants. The writer refers to the readers as 'you', as though inviting them to be in the same situation as the writer. The writer attempted to build a connection with the readers by using phatic language in order to create close social relationships. Inmates are commonly seen as despicable, criminal, and problems of society, but they are also human with hearts and feelings. Therefore, greeting using phatic language is very important in communication [12]. Below are the titles of the short stories that have some relevance to the real-life stories of the writers.

CONCLUSION

The author is very proud that these female inmates, with their shortcomings, could write short stories. They ended up there due to different reasons; theft, corruption, and mostly drugs. The stories they wrote are characterized by true experience as the background. The reflection of the writers' own lives was well illustrated in the stories, such as tragedy, regrets, hope and longing. The main characters were almost all women, which shows that the writers wanted direct involvement in the stories; they wanted to develop the stories as they expected. By writing stories, the inmates could express their feelings to ease their burden as it has therapeutical effects.

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