

Woman Representation In Milk And Honey Poetry By Rupi Kaur Based On Readers Perspective

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Abstract

The figure of a woman is an interesting topic to discuss because of the many phenomena that occur around woman, such as discrimination, sexual harassment and so on. One of them is in the *Milk and Honey* poetry by Rupi Kaur. *Milk and Honey* tells about love, sexual abuse, and violence experienced by woman. An interesting phenomenon in this poetry is the woman representation of a female character who is clearly depicted by the poet. The representation of woman is described in two aspects, namely: self and social aspects (Sugihastuti, 2000).

However, the research questions is how is the response of readers to the woman representation and what the moral value that readers get in *Milk and Honey*?. For this reason, researcher used the readers response approach. The purpose are to find out the response of readers to the woman representation and moral value that readers get. Design of research is qualitative and interview as an instrument.

The finding in this research are the physical aspect was described as beautiful and body goals. In psychological aspect, woman are weak and helpless, but on the other hand, psychologically, woman are also described as strong woman. Meanwhile, the role of woman in family is described as daughter who are oppressed by man. The role of woman in society, namely woman in second place and as motivators. The moral messages obtained by the readers include being a strong and brave woman, loving yourself and believing that in life there are joys and sadness.

Key Words: Woman Representation, Moral Value, Readers Response, Milk and Honey.

Abstrak

Sosok wanita menjadi topik yang menarik untuk didiskusikan karena banyaknya fenomena yang terjadi seputar wanita, seperti diskriminasi, pelecehan seksual dan sebagainya. Salah satunya dalam puisi *Milk and Honey* karya Rupi Kaur. *Milk and Honey* menceritakan tentang cinta, sexual abuse, and kekerasan yang dialami wanita. Fenomena yang menarik dalam puisi ini adalah representasi tokoh wanita yang digambarkan dengan jelas oleh penyair. Representasi wanita digambarkan melalui dua aspek, yaitu: aspek diri dan sosial (Sugihastuti, 2000).

Namun yang menjadi pertanyaan peneliti adalah bagaimana dengan perspektif pembaca yang lain terkait representasi wanita dalam puisi *Milk and Honey*?. Serta, pesan moral yang diperoleh pembaca dalam puisi *Milk and Honey*?. Untuk itu, peneliti menggunakan pendekatan readers response. Tujuan dalam penelitian ini yaitu untuk mengetahui bagaimana respon pembaca terkait representasi wanita dan pesan moral yang diperoleh pembaca dalam puisi *Milk & Honey*. Desain penelitian ini adalah kualitatif dan wawancara sebagai instrumen.

Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa representasi wanita dalam aspek fisik, digambarkan sebagai wanita cantik, body goals, lemah, tertindas, kuat, pejuang, dan cinta terhadap diri sendiri. Dalam aspek psikis, wanita bersifat lemah dan tak berdaya karena perkataan/perbuatan yang dilakukan oleh laki-laki, namun dilain sisi psikologi wanita juga digambarkan sebagai wanita yang kuat dan tangguh. Sedangkan, peran wanita dalam keluarga digambarkan sebagai anak yang tertekan oleh laki-laki. Adapun peran wanita dalam masyarakat yaitu wanita di posisi kedua dan sebagai motivator. Pesan moral yang diperoleh pembaca antara lain, yaitu menjadi wanita yang kuat dan berani, mencintai diri sendiri dan percaya bahwa dalam kehidupan ada senang dan sedih.

Kata Kunci: Representasi Wanita, Pesan Moral, Respon Pembaca, Milk and Honey.

A. Introduction

Literature is a form or way of writers expressing themselves by express an idea or problem that occurs in the form of a work. This work is called literary work. According to Wellek & Warren (1989: 14-15), literary works are imaginative works of language mediated with dominant aesthetic functions. A literary work created not only displays ideas or problems that exist in society but literary works can also provide a function of beauty and usefulness (*Dulce et utile*) for the reader. According to Warren in Islam (2016: 17), *Dulce et utile* is one of the standard functions in writing literary works. *Dulce* means that when readers read literary works, they feel happy and comfortable, at least they can enjoy the beauty of literary works. Meanwhile, *et utile* is the function of literary works in which the readers will benefit from the literary work.

Currently, a literary work that has been published no longer focuses on (structural) text only, but must also pay attention to readers as consumers of literary works. Because every readers must have a different perspective. From that point of view, the role of the readers in literary works is interesting to study. Appreciating literary works from the perspective of the readers can provide various perspectives, so that a literary work has broad meaning and benefits. Not only that, for a writer, of course the work is aimed at readers so that it is read, enjoyed and the writer can know the acceptance of his/her work in society. Reader's perception can be applied to various kinds of literary works, one of which is poetry.

Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey* poetry is the object of this research. This poetry described woman's lives, about love, sexual abuse, violence, discrimination and a woman's struggles. From this, the phenomenon that dominates in *Milk and Honey* is a very unique representation of woman presented by Rupi Kaur where the poet provides pictures in each part to make it easier for readers to understand the contents of the poetry. *Milk and Honey* is divided into four chapters and each chapter carries a different theme. The four chapters are *the hurting*, *the loving*, *the breaking*, and *the healing*. All chapters depict a woman who experiences oppression.

According to Sugihastuti (2000: 112-113) the depiction of woman comes from the situation and views of woman from within themselves and socially, which includes aspects of identity and social. The aspect of self is divided into two, physical and psychological. To clarify the physical aspect, it is divided into three, namely traits, behavior and occupation (Brannon: 2007). The physical aspects of woman can be observed from their biological conditions, while the psychological aspects are closely related to woman's psychology. In the *Milk and Honey* poetry, the woman representation in a physical aspect is depicted as a woman displaying vulgar, body curves that impression of sensuality. Of course, we can observe it from the words and signs in the form of a hand-drawn illustration of Rupi Kaur. This is categorized in the behavior or appearance of a woman.

However, the questions of the researcher is how is the response of readers to the woman representation in *Milk and Honey* poetry and what are the moral value that the readers get. Therefore, the benefit in this research is to know woman representation and moral value in *Milk and Honey*. To find out the moral value, the researcher uses Nurgiyantoro's theory (1995), which differentiates in to three, moral value with God, moral value of human life with itself and moral value in social life.

B. Method

The form of literary work in this research is poetry, entitled *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur as a object. The research subjects consisted of ten readers who came from STKIP PGRI Jombang. The research method used is qualitative research with a case study design. Because this research focuses on the perspective of the readers, so to find out this, the appropriate approach is the readers response. The instrument of this research is interview. The source of data and data in this research came from the anthology *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur, as the first data source, while the second data source was the readers response. The data in this case are forms of quotations of words, sentences, images and readers' responses. To obtain data, the researcher make recruitment flyers, map

an theory, recruitment of readers and conduct interviews. To analyze the results of the interviews, the researcher conducted transcription, coding and data reflection.

C. Findings

The findings in this research are in woman-self representation. In physical aspects is divided into four: i) The physical representation of woman in general is body goals woman, each of answered is supported by all of readers perspective. ii) Physical woman based on traits / characters are described as weak woman as evidenced by six of readers and four readers described strong woman. iii) Physical woman based on behavior. Eight readers described woman who are silent, while two of readers thought that woman are strong and firm. iv) Physical woman based on activity / occupation showed seven of readers described the figure of a woman who fights for her life, while three of readers thought that woman in living their lives by loving themselves. Woman's representation in psychological aspects, as much as eight the readers said that woman are weak, oppressed, helpless and so on. But, two readers thought that female psychological are strong and optimistic.

Woman-social representation. Which that all the readers answered the role of woman in family as a daughter, with their weak, quiet, injured and others. In society, nine of readers who thought woman are in second place in society, and one reader thought that woman are motivator for others woman.

The moral value obtained by the readers, there was two types, i) moral value with God, that three readers said the God give each people or human have happiness and sadness in life. ii) moral value human life with itself, which six of readers said that we must be strong woman and brave to reject and rebel, must love ourself, supported by one reader. Not only that, the researcher found the types of oppression. All readers said that the oppression is violence. And all the readers assess that *Milk and Honey* poetry worth it for read by other readers.

D. Discussion

The poet in this poetry is Rupi Kaur. In every work, she always added images to easier the readers in understanding the content. So, mostly of readers are affected by the images. *Milk and Honey* poetry told about the woman that who has an oppressed by man. It indicated that in social, the community still influenced by the patriarchal system. Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices that position man as those who dominate, oppress, and exploit woman (Walby, 2014: 28). A society that adopts a patriarchal system places man in a higher status and power than woman. Man are seen as stronger (superior) than woman in all aspects of life. It is seen from the woman which to express their opinions are forbidden. They can only be silent and keep quiet about all the words and deeds done by man. So, indirectly the space and their rights as an individual are limited. Not only that, power of man also occurred in society, proved from the woman who is second position and as a sexual object in society.

In this discussion, the researcher not only discuss about woman representation and moral value but also talked about the readers response which is the approach in this research. Readers response is very useful in literary studies, because readers response theory tries to capture the phenomenon perceived by the readers in relation to the issues created by the author. So, the writer will know how her / his literary works acceptance in the society. The acceptance of literary works, especially *Milk and Honey* poetry by Rupi Kaur, was greatly appreciated by all respondents who said that this poetry was worth it to reading by other readers. But, the readers provide an age limit for other readers, because it relates to the vulgar pictures. This happened because of cultural differences. Which, the poet (Rupi Kaur) is come from India, *Milk and Honey* poetry was published / popularized in New York, United States, and the readers that come from Indonesian. Indonesian culture which adheres to East culture is still familiar with respectful customs (*unggah-ungguh*) and ethics. Especially the readers who lived in Jombang, with the majority of population coming from Javanese ethnic. The Javanese people themselves, when talked about sex and vulgar pictures in this poetry are considered taboo (not good to talked about). Indian society still adheres to a patriarchal social system, where man have a higher degree than woman.

Supported also by their religion which is Hinduism who knows the existence of a caste system, where woman was born from the lowest caste will experienced discrimination, both in terms of education, social, economic and so on. In United States who are already familiar with woman's emancipation is evident from the increasing number of woman working outside. And little by little woman's rights can be fulfilled but not completely.

However, from this readers response approach there are several things or issues that cannot be captured in detail related to the woman representation by the readers. For example, in the used or writing of the letter (I). The letter (I) which is grammatically written in capital letters, in this poetry the letter (I) is written using the letters (i) lowercase. The letter (i) is small indicated how small or low woman are in the society, especially man. From the form of writing like that already indicated that woman are underestimated, unimportant, and oppressed. Not only the used of the letter (I), but all the writings in *Milk and Honey* poetry used lowercase letters, even after full stop mark that should be or automatically used uppercase letters, there written using lowercase letters.

In addition, if we looked at the physical book of *Milk and Honey* poetry that used a black cover, where black here indicated sadness that can cause feelings of oppressed. This is consistent with the content of the poetry that is told the woman who was depressed and oppressed because of events in her past. As well as seen from the title (*Milk and Honey*), the poet took the title very much in accordance with the personality or feminine of woman. Where “Milk” has a meaning “soft”, which accordance with the personality of the woman that is gentle. And also “Honey” which in this case means “thick and strong”. The title of *Milk and Honey* is accordance with the personality of woman who are the main character, which is woman have a gentle and patiently accepting trials / problems and on the other hand woman also have the strength to survive and solve all the problems in their lives.

E. Conclusion

Woman-self representation that divided into two, physical and pshychological. In physical aspect, woman are represented as body goals woman which in the quotation and is supported with some image, that is indicated that all readers agree with that. Woman in pshychological aspect represented are weak, there are eight readers said that. But, in the other hand the woman have strong. In woman-social representation also divided into two, there are role woman in family and society. All of readers said that the role woman in family as a daughter that who has oppressed by man. It also occurs in society, where woman are in second place or lowest in society. But, in the other hand woman are represented as a motivator for other woman. The moral value obtained by the readers, there was two types, moral value with God. The God give each people or human have happiness and sadness in life. Moral value human life with itself, which the readers said that we must be strong woman and brave to reject and rebel.

F. Suggestion

This research can be a reference for other researchers, where this research used the readers response as an approach. The readers in this research are readers among students, especially in college. Based on the results of this research, the suggestion that can be given the researcher is when the other researchers take a literary research that uses readers response as an approach, should be decided the readers in accordance with the objectives of the research. However, it would be better if the readers or respondent used as the subject of research has higher competence, such as writers or man of letters, teachers, lecturers and others, so that the results obtained are more detailed and maximal.

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