

## **Deconstruction of female characters in short stories**

***"al-mar'ah al-fātinah wa al-rajūl al-hakīm"***

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### **Abstract**

*The world of women in literary works is still trapped in never-ending gender stereotypes. This qualitative library study aims to analyze and criticize the depiction of female characters in the short story Al-Mar'ah Al-Fātinah Wa Al-rajūl Al-hakīm deconstructively. In analyzing the short story, this study uses a feminist literary criticism perspective equipped with a deconstruction method. The results of this study are that Fatomi, as a female character in the story, is depicted as a woman who tends to be negative. It is different from the male character, who is portrayed positively. In addition, this study also indicates that with the data and facts the researcher found, women depicted negatively in a short story have a positive side implied in the short story. Among them is that women truly have a heroic, wise, and patient soul. As well as criticism of this short story as a conclusion to voice egalitarianism between men and women rationally and religiously.*

**Keywords:** short story, feminist literary criticism, deconstruction

### **Abstrak**

Dunia perempuan masih terjebak dalam stereotip gender yang tak kunjung berakhir. Penelitian ini hadir untuk menganalisis dan mengkritik tentang penggambaran tokoh perempuan pada cerita pendek *Al-Mar'ah Al-Fātinah Wa Al-rajūl Al-hakīm* secara dekonstruktif. Dalam menganalisis cerpen tersebut, penelitian ini menggunakan persepektif kritik sastra feminis dilengkapi dengan metode dekonstruksi. Adapun hasil dari penelitian ini adalah Fatomi sebagai tokoh Perempuan di dalam cerita tersebut digambarkan sebagai sosok perempuan yang cenderung negatif. Hal tersebut berbeda dengan tokoh laki-laki yang digambarkan positif. Selain itu, dalam penelitian ini juga terindikasi bahwa dengan data dan fakta yang peneliti temukan, perempuan yang digambarkan negatif dalam sebuah cerpen tersebut memiliki sisi positif yang tersirat dalam cerpen. Di antaranya adalah wanita sejatinya memiliki jiwa



heroik, bijaksana, dan sabar. Kritik terhadap cerpen ini juga menyuarakan egaliterianisme antara laki-laki dan perempuan secara rasional dan agamis.

**Kata kunci:** *cerita pendek, kritik sastra feminis, dekonstruksi*

## INTRODUCTION

The world of women in literary works is still trapped in never-ending gender stereotypes. This is reflected in some Arab writers who build a bad image of women in their works. In Arabic literature we know the names of Abū al-A'lā al-Ma'āri, Tawfiq al-Hakīm, Tāhā Ḥusayn, Najib Maḥfūt and also al-'Aqqād who in his works tends to hate women (Latifi, 2015). Negative depictions of women do not stop at past literary works. Even today, there are still many literary works that tend to stereotype women and dislike or hate women which we know as misogynistic. One of these literary works is the short story *Al-Mar'ah al-Fātinah Wa al-Rajūl al-Hakīm* on one of the websites (Al-Buhi, 2021).

The short story *Al-Mar'ah al-Fātinah Wa al-Rajūl al-Hakīm* written by Muḥammad Labīb al-Būhī tells about a woman named "Fatomi". This female character is depicted very negatively in the short story. Some people call it a curse and some others call it a devil in the form of a woman. It doesn't stop there, Fatomi is also depicted as a seductive, vengeful and disruptive woman to men's minds. This needs to be corrected because women are not creatures who always tend to be negative. This is proven at the beginning of creation that women are the same as men. Allah SWT has determined that there is no difference between the two. The difference between men and women lies in their piety (Mulia Siregar, 2017). The proof is, after Fatomi realized her behavior, she became a better woman than the man who had made her aware, namely Harun al-Hakīm.

This study also continues the studies of feminist literary criticism that have been studied, whether in the form of poetry, novels, or short stories. For example, the study of the novel '*Azra' Jakarta* written by Yulia Nasrul Latifi with hermeneutic feminist literary criticism that the female characters in the novel present the figure of an Indonesian woman who has a statesman's soul and is loyal to social (Latifi, 2021). Then the study written by Muhammad Jafar Shiddiq on the study of feminist literary criticism using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic method on Jamil Shidqi Az-Zahawi's poetry states that women have an equal role with men in building human and Islamic civilization (Shiddiq, 2023). Then, a study of feminist literary criticism written by Suaibatul Aslamiyah et al. That women also have the right to resist patriarchal culture which is considered normal in society (Aslamiyah et al., 2020). From these three

studies, this research finds a continuous intersection in the study of feminist literary criticism and the problems of women's rights. However, it has a novelty in terms of its analysis method, namely the theory of deconstruction as a critique of this short story and a new reading of the image of women in literary works.

The research on the short story *Al-Mar'ah al-Fatinah Wa al-Rajul al-Hakim* uses the lens of feminist literary criticism by deconstructing the female characters in the short story. This is due to the stereotypical depiction of women and the very strong misogynistic side. The purpose of this deconstruction is changing negative depiction of women in the short story *Al-Mar'ah al-Fatinah Wa al-Rajul al-Hakim* and bringing up a new depiction of women in the short story.

## METHOD

The research method in this study is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive analysis is done by describing the data which is then followed by analysis (Ratna, 2013). The data analysis techniques used are identification, interpretation, analysis, and conclusion. The data source in this study is the short story text *Al-Mar'ah al-Fatinah Wa al-Rajul al-Hakim* which is accessed through the *Dar Syarikat 'Alam* website. The data used in literary research can be in the form of units found in data sources that are related to words, phrases, sentences, stanzas, lines, paragraphs, and/or metaphors that have significance for the research (Ahmadi, 2019). The data used in this study are phrases, clauses and sentences contained in the short story *Al-Mar'ah al-Fatinah Wa al-Rajul al-Hakim*. The phrases, clauses, and sentences become a quote that will be displayed in this study as research evidence so that the analysis carried out by the researcher is more accurate.

The data collection technique used in this study is the reading and note-taking technique. Endaswara explained that in collecting literary work data, it is done by reading carefully, then collecting data by marking/noting relevant data to answer the problem formulation (Endraswara, 2008). The collected data was then identified and grouped for analysis using deconstruction theory.

This study uses the theory of deconstruction with a feminist literary criticism perspective. The deconstruction process involves identifying binary opposition concepts that appear in the text. This binary refers to pairs of words that are opposite to each other and have a hierarchy. It should be noted that this hierarchy is contingent because in the framework of the post-structuralist view, language is considered unstable (Derrida, 1998). The feminist literary criticism approach in this context aims to break down binary oppositional concepts such

as male and female, masculinity and femininity. This is done to reveal the ideologies and interests that underlie these concepts and also to undermine the foundations of the hierarchy that is built (Latifi, 2015). So that this research has a rhythm in collecting data from data sources, namely the short story *Al-Mar'ah al-Fatinah Wa al-Rajul al-Hakim* from the *Dar Syarikat Alam* website (Al-Buhi, 2021). Then the data is collected according to the feminist theme or gender gap between women and men. After being collected, the data will be deconstructed to be analyzed with arguments from the perspective of experts in the field of gender and religion as a critique of this work.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Binary Opposition

In this research which focuses on feminist literary criticism using the deconstruction method, there is a binary opposition initiated by Muhamad Labib al-Buhī in his short story. The idea of binary opposition is contained in the following table:

No	Male > < Female (opposite)	
1	Wise in nature	Not characterized as wise
2	Not characterized as charming	Characterized as charming

Both of the above are the titles of this short story. From the title alone, it is clear that there is a gender bias there, where the author of the short story gives different characteristics to men and women. The nature or attitude of wisdom tends to be attached to the figure of a man because wisdom is usually the nature of a leader. While the person being led is rarely given the title of wise even though in fact the person being led can be as wise or even wiser than the person leading. This is different from the female character in this short story. The title alone is very stereotypical of women. The negative depiction of the figure of women is already visible in this title.

### Stereotypes of Women

In addition to the binary opposition that influences Labib's ideas in his work. He also corners female characters with his stereotypes. The ideas that contain stereotypes of women are in the following table:

No	Male ≠ Female (not the same)	
1	Not stereotyped by physical depiction	Described physically, for example beautiful or has a beautiful body

2	Not depicted as a flower	Described as a flower
3	Not stereotyped as easily touched by words	Easily touched by words
4	Not stereotyped as someone who cries easily	Easy to cry

This short story contains several ideas about things that are specific to women as the table above. There are several quotes that reinforce stereotypes about women in this short story.

a. فإذا بفاطومي في غلالة بيضاء من نسج شفيف يشي بكل مفاتن جسدها ، وكانت تدور حول نفسها راقصة في مرح ، وهي تغنى لأنها عابدة لجمالها

*"Then Fatomi put on a white tunic of transparent weave that revealed all the charms of her body, and she whirled round and round dancing in joy, and she sang as if she adored her beauty."*

In this quote it is clear that the woman is proud of her beauty and the beauty of her body, while this is not depicted in the man in the short story.

b. كان شباب القرى والمدن جميا يطلقون عليها اسم "زهرة البنفسج اليانعة"

*"And the young people of the villages and towns all call it "the ripe purple flower."*

This quote explains that women are often called flowers. This only applies to women because men are never depicted that way.

c. لأول مرة استمعت فاطومي في حياتها لمثل هذه الكلمات ، فشملتها غضب شديد ، ولكنها جمعت غلالتها تماما ، وتدخل بعضها في بعض وصرخت في وجه هارون : انسحب من وجهي

*"For the first time in her life, Fatomi heard such words, and she was very angry, but she controlled herself completely, her feelings were mixed and she cried before Harun: Get away from me!"*

In this quote, it tells that a woman named Fatomi was touched by Harun's wise words so that Fatomi felt angry, but then cried because it was the first time she heard wise words like those said by Harun. Her heart was touched. That is the stereotype that is depicted in the figure of women in this short story.

d. ثم عادت مسرعة إلى غرفتها ، وانكفت في فراشها تبكي ، وامتد بها البكاء ساعات وساعات

*"then she quickly returned to her room, and fell back on her bed crying, and the crying continued for a long time."*

Then after Harun left her house, Fatomi cried even harder in her room and for a long time. This quote illustrates that women are not only easily touched by words but also cry easily. This is not stereotyped in men.

### Misogynist

Labīb in his work also inserts some misogynistic ideas and negative views on female characters as hate speech. The misogynistic ideas in the short story Al-Mar'ah al-Fātinah Wa al-Rajūl al-Hakīm are in the following table:

No		Male ≠ Female (not the same)
1	-	Vengeful
2	-	Teaser
3	-	Curse
4	-	The troublemaker of men's minds

This short story contains misogyny or hatred directed at women. There is a quote that says that Fatomi did evil because she wanted to avenge her people (women) on men by humiliating them. This vengeful nature is not depicted in this short story. Another quote also mentions that Fatomi seduced Harun by wearing a transparent tunic that showed off her body's charm, which is not found in a man in the short story.

In another quote, it is mentioned that Fatomi is a curse. While at the end of the story, the wise Harun is pensive in his room after being tempted by Fatomi. He is thinking about the beauty and beauty of Fatomi's body. Harun's mind is confused by her so that Harun intends to enjoy Fatomi's body. This can happen because of Fatomi's temptation.

These negative depictions of women show that there are many misogynistic aspects in this short story. The quotes from the short story are as follows:

- a. وألقى بها حطاماً فهي تنتقم لنفسها ولجنسها بإذلال الرجال  
"she avenged herself and her gender by humiliating men."
- b. فإذا بفاطومي في غلالة بيضاء من نسج شفيف يشي بكل مفاتن جسدها ، وكانت تدور حول نفسها راقصة في مرح ، وهي تغنى كأنها عابدة لجمالها ، تتبعذ لذلك الجمال ، وأغمض عينيه وتمتم بيضع

كلمات وهو يقول في نفسه: ما أشد وطأة هذه الفتنة على قلوب الشباب ! .. أي مخلوق من طين يستطيع الصمود أمام هذا الإغراء !

*"Then Fatomi put on a white tunic of transparent weave that showed all the charms of her body, and she whirled around dancing In joy, and she sang as if she were worshipping her beauty, worshipping that beauty, and she closed her eyes and muttered a few words while saying to herself: How heavy is this seduction in the heart of a young man! ? .. What human creature can resist this temptation!"*

c. كان رجال المدينة يسمونها "فاطومي" ، وكان الشيوخ منهم يسمونها اللعنة  
*"The townspeople used to call it "Fatomi", and the elders among them called it a curse."*

d. وجلس شارداً يتذكر تفاصيل هذه المغامرة ، وعلى الرغم منه ارتفعت همسات من أعماقه ..  
 ما أروع فتنتها ! ؟ وما أجمل هذا الجسد ! ؟ وارتسمت صورتها أمامه وهي تدور في غلالتها راقصة تتبع لجمالها ، ومررت دقائق وهو يحقق مأمورها في هذا الخيال الفاتن الساحر الأذاذ.  
*"He sat pensively recalling the details of this adventure. A whisper rose from the depths of his soul.. What a provocation! ? How beautiful is this body! ? And her picture appeared before him as she (Fatomi) whirled in her tunic, a dancer worshipping her beauty, and time passed as he gazed, entranced by this charming imagination."*

### Deconstruction of misogynistic ideas and stereotypes in short stories

This short story depicts women negatively and tends to contain hatred towards women. However, this short story actually also contains deconstruction that reverses the facts that have been stated above. The deconstruction contained in this short story is in the following table:

No	Female > Male (Women are more powerful and take care of themselves)	
1	A wife faces problems wisely and patiently when her husband is hit by Fatomi's magic	-
2	When Fatomi realized her mistake, she refused to be touched by Harun, the person who had made her aware.	-

Meanwhile, the short story quotes that explain the above incident are as follows:

a. ولكن الزوجة كانت على شيء من الحكمة والأناة ، فلم تشا أن تقيم على الأمر فضيحة..... كان عليها إذن أن تعالج الأمر في هدوء ، ولم يكن أمامها إلا أن تلجم باب الحكم هارون  
*"But the wife was wise and patient, and she did not want to make a scandal about this matter. .... So she had to handle the matter calmly, and she had no choice but to enter the door of the wise Aaron."*

b. فمد يده يريد أن يتحسس جسدها ملطفاً فامعنت النظر في عينيه ، ثم اندفعت إلى الداخل تصرخ : خنزير .. خنزير  
*"He reached out his hand, wanting to touch her body, to caress her, then he looked into her eyes, then rushed in and shouted: Pig... Pig."*

From the deconstructive reading above, it is known that women have a positive side which is described by Labib indirectly or symbolically. The facts about women that have been described in the data findings above are indeed derived from Labib's quotes in his short story. So this indicates a new reading to open up stereotypes that result in misogynistic and superior attitudes in men based on culture or wrong religious interpretations.

The case of the female character Fatomi written by Labib is very different from other literary characters such as the image of the character Taia in the novel Masyitoh by Ajip Rosyidi, which is said to be a character who is responsible, has leadership, is part of society and is independent (Dedi Kurniadi, 2024). This is very much at odds with Labib with his negative depiction of female characters in this study.

Apart from that, the problem of women in the depiction of literary works, especially Arabic, if viewed holistically starting to resist the grip of patriarchal culture, for example the work of Kahlil Gibran and Nawal Sa'dawi in destroying Arab marriage customs that marginalize and harm women (Yandrefo et al., 2020). In line with the depiction of women in the spectacular Indonesian novels that we find, the majority show criticism and messages that women and men have equal duties and responsibilities in terms of gender, not sex (Afiah, 2021; Arsita et al., 2023; Muyassaroh, 2021). However, in contrast to Labib who portrays women negatively and openly those women are a trials or test for men, nothing more than that.

Misogynistic ideas and stereotypes in literary works, especially Arabic, are beginning to be attacked and also destroyed by writers who are at odds with Labib in voicing thoughts about women and men. As above, there is Nawal Sa'dawi who wrote many literary works to deconstruct stereotypical gender thinking (Anggradinata, 2022). And besides female writers, there are also male writers who fight for the image of women in Arab culture, namely

Ihsan Abdul Quddus (Anggreani et al., 2023), Kahlil Gibran (Susiati et al., 2022), Nizar Qabbani (Hayati & Syafaah, 2022), and Jamil Sidqi Zahawi (Shiddiq, 2023). The above is different from Labīb who describes women in a negative view and even as a test for men who are seen as perfect creatures after passing the test.

Then the negative image of women based on religion is just an interpretation that is used as a shield for men to perpetuate stereotypes that have frozen over time. In feminist and Al-Quran studies, Danial explores the interpretation between masculine and feminine backgrounds to pave the way for equality between men and women. She said that "men should not completely oppress women under the pretext of interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, but sometimes Western feminists are too extreme in viewing verses that seem to marginalize them" (Achmad, 2024). Thus, the existence of scholars who are skilled and expert in this field tries to respect and equalize men and women in social, family, and religious life.

Religious interpretations do have a strong and constructive foundation so that women who are considered to be less connected to knowledge will follow without hesitation and aware of the consequences of gender equality. As Lukman in his research revealed, many literary works with religious themes still marginalize female characters, even containing discriminatory actions or statements in them (Hakim et al., 2023). Then, like Yulia's analysis of stereotypes which are indeed based on religion to confine women in the turmoil of gender marginality (Latifi & Udasmoro, 2020). This is in line with this short story which requires criticism and rebuilding of thinking about women who are marginalized by the religious interpretation held firmly by the author in depicting female characters.

From the several explanations of gender problems explained above, deconstruction needs to be carried out on Labib's work that has indications of religious interpretation that is far from justice for women and men. In addition, it is irrational that men have civilization and name, while women are only a test in life. So, this needs to be reviewed widely in the realm of egalitarianism, both religious and rational arguments to destroy the bad images of women in Labīb's work with the short story *Al-Mar'ah al-Fātinah Wa al-Rajūl al-Hakīm*.

## **Egalitarianism**

If observed carefully and thoroughly, this short story actually contains egalitarianism between men and women, in which men need women when a husband is hit by Fatomi's magic. He needs his wife to help him free himself from Fatomi's shackles. If not helped by his wife, of course the husband would

have fallen into Fatomi's arms, in which women need men when a wife asks for help from the wise Harun. Harun is a man. So that men and women need each other.

In addition to needing each other, men and women in this short story also have the same desire to seduce and channel their lust in the wrong way. This is seen in a quote where Fatomi seduces Harun by showing off her charming body and dancing to seduce Harun. Meanwhile, Harun after returning home, he imagines the beautiful and seductive Fatomi. He wants to enjoy it, so Harun can't stand it anymore and immediately goes to Fatomi's house and wants to touch and caress her. This shows that negative things like this are not only attached to women, but also to men.

The following is a table of Egalitarianism between men and women:

No	Male = Female (just the same)
1	Need a girl Need a man
2	Seducing women and wanting to channel their lust Seducing men and intending to channel lust

In addition, if we discuss in more detail in terms of rationality and science that the egalitarian case between men and women in this case is the realm of gender not the realm of sex. The relationship between sex or biological sex is indeed women and men have very significant differences. However, it is different from the egalitarianism discussed in this study in the form of their needs in roles and responsibilities engineered by social, cultural, or religious interpretations. That women and men should be created to have the same sense of responsibility to maintain the balance of civilization and human life.

In line with the paragraph above Larsen & Long have revealed that the orientation of women's and men's roles is distinguished from two perspectives, namely traditional and egalitarian gender roles (Long, 1988). This shows that women and men are able and can fulfill each other's roles and responsibilities. For example, women can work in the kitchen, so can men, or vice versa, men work in the office, so can women. In the case of the short story above, men have a wise attitude in the role of love relationships, so women can do it too. And if women are allowed to cry, then men are also allowed to cry because crying is a humane action or role as a human being. So egalitarianism is an understanding that balances the roles and responsibilities between men and women, not exaggerating one of them.

The religious perspective in this study is based on Islam, because the short story writer sets the story with an Islamic nuance. That writer with Islamic or religious nuances is more likely to corner or make women subordinate in gender matters. In fact, Islamic values uphold the nobility of a woman from any angle. As written in the Koran Surah Al-Ahzab verse 35 that Allah made the position of men and women equal in terms of responsibilities and roles which says "Indeed, men and women who are Muslims, men and women who are believers, men and women who persist in their obedience, men and women who are righteous, men and women who are patient, men and women who are humble, men and women who give alms, men and women who fast, men and women who maintain their honor, men and women who often mention (name) Allah, Allah has provided for them forgiveness and a great reward" (Quran, nd).

From both perspectives between religion and science that egalitarianism between women and men is not denied by both. Women and men are like two wings on a bird, if one of them is lost or does not function properly then the bird will not fly. And so if one of the women or men is not cared for or even subordinated then human civilization will be flawed, not develop, even decline. Therefore, this study is here to criticize the negative stigma andgiving rise to a new understanding of egalitarianism that is in accordance with rationality and religion.

## CONCLUSION

The short story *Al-Mar'ah al-Fatinah Wa al-Rajul al-Hakim* is a short story that shows many negative sides of women. It feels unfair if negative things are always attached to women while positive things are attached to men. It appears in the binary opposition data that a man has a wise predicate while women are the opposite. In addition, this study shows the existence of stereotypes in women and also a strong misogynistic side. However, this cannot be completely justified because in reality women have a heroic, patient, and wise side in dealing with problems. So that Egalitarianism as a protector and wise nature to deal with gender problems between men and women is found in this study.

Egalitarianism has been recognized in Islam since its inception. This concept is also match with rationality. In this short story, there appears to be a predominantly negative and stereotypical portrayal of female characters. However, through a deconstructive and critical reading, it is argued that the author instinctively conveys several egalitarian views between men and women, emphasizing mutual dependence in line with religious teachings and our rational understanding as human beings.

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