

## **THE PERCEPTION OF “BEAUTIFUL” INDONESIAN WOMEN IN THE EKA KURNIAWAN’S NOVEL “BEAUTY IS A WOUND”**

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### **Abstract**

Literature as a means of cultural and social representation that describes gender relations. One of the literary criticisms is a view called feminism, which is the women's movement caused by the awareness that women have the same rights as men. This article aims to discuss or analyze perceptions or views about the expression 'beautiful' for Indonesian women in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" by Eka Kurniawan. This research is included in the field of literary criticism, therefore the writer used a qualitative method with descriptive analysis, which is case study research. This study is based on the theory of feminism, in which from time to time the concept of women's beauty changes, from being purely sexual to political. The results of the analysis showed that the term "beautiful" in the main character Dewi Ayu is reflected in her attitude, such as her appearance, intelligence, generosity, and courage in the figure of Dewi Ayu in the novel "Beauty is a Wound".

**Keywords:** Beautiful, Dewi Ayu, Feminism

### **INTRODUCTION**

Literature is a manifestation of the existence of life in society. The things that can be described in a literary work about society can be in the form of social arrangements, functions and patterns of society, as well as regarding social relations of society. The description of social interaction in society cannot be separated from the interaction between men and women (Islamiya 2019). Both are interesting things to study in the social construction of society. A literary work expresses the values of life to educate the people who read it. The values of life depicted in the story can influence the way humans think about living life. Literature is a means of cultural and social representation that describes gender relations. This facility is one of the ways to express desires, needs, and human rights as women. Women's rights are not interpreted as women's participation but as rights for all activities (Aryani et al 2021).

One of the literature criticisms, there is a view called feminism, which is a women's movement caused by the awareness that women have the same rights as men, which demands women's independence to do anything. “Feminism deviates from the opinion that women are basically being bullied and exploited” (Minaryati et al 2021). Feminism seeks to explore women's identities that have been obscured by patriarchal hegemony. Identity is needed as the basis of a movement that fights for equal rights and the elimination of all oppression against women. According to (Minaryanti et al 2021) the role of women in the public sector tends to be used by men to broaden their thinking. Women are exploited in terms of business and sex. These actions are related to the operation of prostitution services, and pornographic subject activities due to intimidation, coercion, kidnapping and forced labor. This can eliminate the essence of feminism which

is proud and admired by women's groups.

Novel is a fictional prose story of considerable length with different complexity and usually related to human experience, either in individual or in a group connected in some events and particular environment. Novel has a broad framework, the genre of the novel encompassed an extensive range of types and styles: picaresque, epistolary, Gothic, romantic, realist, historical - to name only some of the more important ones. The novel can be categorized into three types of novels which are educational novels, feminist and romance novels. In his work, Eka Kurniawan wrote a novel entitled "*Cantik itu Luka*" which has been translated into several languages and has received appreciation from the outside community. The novel tells about the existing picture of reality, which tells of a woman character. In most fictional stories, the position of female characters is seen as lower than that of men, men are considered to have more power in any aspect. Therefore, women often get injustice in every aspect of life. In this case, feminism plays a role in fighting for women's rights and liberation from male pressure. Feminism aims to explore women's identities hidden by male power. Women's identity needs to be fought for to end male domination from all oppression of women and try to equalize the position between women and men. This is an understanding of women's rights and roles in literary works. This novel not only describes the historical aspects of the colonial era but also reveals the true meaning of the word "beautiful".

Previous research discussed feminism in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" which is seen from various perspectives as well as dialogue excerpts from each character. (Fitri, Sumiharti, and Harbeng, 2021) in her research entitled "*Aspek Feminisme Radikal Tokoh Dewi Ayu dalam Novel Cantik itu Luka Karya Eka Kurniawan*", the results of their research found that aspects of feminism in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" include aspects of physical violence, exploitation, and the role of women. Not much different from that research, several previous studies, such as (Dian, 2019) "*Perlawanan Perempuan dalam Novel Cantik itu Luka Karya Eka Kurniawan: Tindakan Feminisme Sosialis*" found that cases of oppression were found in the novel "Beauty is a Wound", this was experienced firsthand by the character Dewi Ayu. For novelty in this research, it will discuss more on the expression 'beautiful' and related to feminism in the novel "Beauty is a Wound".

The novel discusses the perception of the term 'beautiful' which in the KBBI means only discussing the beauty of a person's appearance or physical condition. However, in this study, the author will examine the term 'beautiful' from several aspects, both from the aspect of beauty itself, intelligence, generosity, and courage. From this research, readers can add new insights, especially for Indonesian women who are still insecure about themselves, and who think they are not beautiful. On the other hand, the term 'beautiful' is not only perceived in one way but can be seen from various points of view. So, the researcher will discuss and analyze the character Dewi Ayu in the novel "Beauty is a Wound" by Eka Kurniawan.

## METHOD

Looking at the title used in this research, the authors conclude that this research belongs to literary criticism, therefore, the author used qualitative methods with descriptive analysis. The purpose of descriptive analysis research is to interpret the more deeply to the reader about the novel through observations from various points of view carried out by the author. (Emzir, 2011: 174).

Because this research uses qualitative methods with descriptive analysis, the first data analysis technique is data reduction. This is the method used by researchers in obtaining the main findings. The second is the presentation of data which is a clear picture of the whole data forming a conclusion. The last method is checking the accuracy and validity of research that has been undertaken supported by valid and consistent evidence, resulting in more credible conclusions.

The data are collected using library research from two sources. The first is primary data, obtained from the novel 'Beautiful is a Wound' in the form of words, phrases, and clauses in the conversation of each paragraph. Secondly, secondary data was obtained from journals related to issues that the author discussed.

The data from this novel and several journals were analyzed by providing interpretations of the collected data and analyzing the behavior of the characters, especially the female character in the novel "Beautiful is a Wound" by raising the role of women and the position of women in the novel. The 'beautiful' Indonesian woman in the novel 'Beautiful is a Wound' was seen from the image of Dewi Ayu.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to interpret the term or expression 'beautiful' in the novel 'Beauty is a Wound' by looking at Dewi Ayu's character, seen from the outside and inside Dewi Ayu's character. The character of Dewi Ayu in the novel 'Beauty is a Wound' is described as an Inlander woman (a term or mockery given by the Dutch to natives) who has a beautiful face, this is supported by the following quotations.

*“Just sixteen years old, and like many mixed-blood girls, the girl was beautiful. She had gleaming black hair and bluish eyes.”* (Pg.,37-38)

In the statement, it is explained how the figure of Dewi Ayu, who is of mixed Dutch-Indonesian descent has blue eyes. That is why Dewi Ayu is famous for her beauty in Halimunda. At the age of adulthood, at the age of 16 to be precise, Dewi Ayu's beauty already radiated, especially when Dewi Ayu was an adult, her beauty was like an angel that could make everyone enchanted by her. Apart from being known as a beautiful character, Dewi Ayu is also a generous person, this is evidenced in several statements, such as:

*“She divvied up the remaining portion into a number of small envelopes to give to the household servants so that they could survive while looking for work someplace else.”* (Pg.55)

Another conversation:

*"You can have all of that," Dewi Ayu said to him, pointing to the gramophone and the shelf of records.*

*"I couldn't!" said Muin. "They belong to our master."*

*"Believe me, dead people don't listen to the music." (Pg.56-57)*

The dialogue above explains behind Dewi Ayu's character as a woman with specifics and strong characteristics, there is also a soft side of her. In the first quote, it is stated that Dewi Ayu gave some of her grandmother's jewelry to her helper to make a living and survive after leaving or being dismissed from Dewi Ayu's house. The reason why Dewi Ayu laid off her workers was that Japan had won the war against the Dutch. Therefore, Halimunda, which was actually under Dutch control, finally fell to Japan. Therefore, people of Dutch descent saved themselves from the Japanese army by changing their place of residence, because if they didn't, they would be captured and even imprisoned by the Japanese Army.

Not much different from the first quote above. In the dialogue, Dewi Ayu also shows her generosity by giving the black plate on the shelf and the gramophone to her helper daughter (inah), Muin, who likes to play music from vinyl records.

Judging from some of the actions and dialogues performed by Dewi Ayu's character, it can be seen that Dewi Ayu's character is classified as an intelligent person with a mindset that is different from women of that time. It can be seen in the following dialogue.

*"They were impressed by her natural intelligence, but worried by her beauty, and a number of nuns tried to persuade her to take the vows of poverty, purity, and chastity. "There's no way," she said. "If every woman took a vow like that, humans would go extinct like the dinosaurs." Her shocking way of speaking was even more troubling than her beauty. In any case, the only thing she liked about religion was the fantastical stories, and the only thing she liked about church was the dulcet tones of the Angelus bells." (Pg.38)*

In that dialogue, it is explained that Dewi Ayu has a different mindset from general women at that time. Women at that time thought that living quietly and safely was everything, women in those days were willing to do anything to get feasibility and comfort in their lives. Unlike Dewi Ayu who thinks that women have the same rights as men, women are free to express themselves. With this in mind, Dewi Ayu clings that freedom is everything. She refuses to take refuge and seeks comfort under the name of religion with the status of a nun. Behind Dewi Ayu's intelligent mindset, there is Dewi Ayu's courage in facing all the problems or events she experiences, this is evidenced in the following quote.

*"What did I tell you," said Dewi Ayu. "We are on an excursion."*

*Each girl got her own room, and the luxury didn't end there. With the help of two servants, Mama Kalong serve them a complete rijsttafel dinner, which, after starving for months on end, was the best thing they had ever tasted. Still, the memory of those they*

*had left behind in the camp made it impossible for most of the girls to enjoy the indulgences.*

In the conversation above, Dewi Ayu actually realized where she and her friends would be taken, to be precise, where they would be used as prostitutes without payment. During her time as a prostitute, Dewi Ayu did not do the same thing as her female friends, spending all day crying over this matter. Unless of doing that, Dewi Ayu thought about how to be free from her unpaid work as a prostitute. She thought that if she got pregnant, she would be freed not to serve the Japanese soldiers again and will be given special privileges in the form of special care for her.

The novel "Beauty is a Wound" in general tells about a mixed Indonesian-Dutch woman named Dewi Ayu who has unrivaled beauty like an angel and can captivate the hearts of men. The definition of beautiful itself according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) is "*Elok*" dan "*Sangat Rupawan*". An Islamic intellectual, Dr. Khalid said beauty is divided into two types; the first is inner beauty and the second is outer beauty. Inner beauty is beauty that comes from within a person that cannot be seen directly by the human eye, such as a beautiful mind and self-purity, while outer beauty is beauty that can be seen by other people's eyes directly, such as having a beautiful face. (Indriya, 2010: 3-4). Not much different, Ashad Kusuma Djaya (2007), defines beauty as total, which is the total size of the body (physics) and mental or personality (inner beauty) then gives birth to true beauty.

Seeing from the description of the definition of beautiful above which was obtained from several sources, if it is associated with the term "beautiful" which is questioned in this study, the author can conclude that the term "beautiful" is reflected in some of the characteristics shown by Dewi Ayu in several dialogues and statements that have been described. In the above explanation, the "beautiful" performed by Dewi Ayu is reflected in her attitude, such as the appearance, intelligence, generosity, and bravery of the figure of Dewi Ayu in the novel "Beautiful is a Wound".

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the analysis of the novel "Beautiful is a Wound", it can be concluded that the term "beautiful" from the main character Dewi Ayu is seen from various aspects, such as aspects of appearance, intelligence, generosity, and courage. Beauty is always accompanied by physical form, sexual relations, and relationships or intimacy with the opposite sex. Women and beauty are an inseparable unit. In this case, women define their beauty standards with the term "beautiful", not only men are involved in setting beauty standards. Because women and beauty are inseparable, the body is identical to women and the mind is identical to men. The novel "Beauty is a Wound" by Eka Kurniawan supports the focus of this research, which is feminism. In this case, beauty is only a symbol and the term "beautiful" is a determinant of behavior and not appearance. Feminist literary studies in the field of literature play a role in criticizing existing gender injustice. Thus this study has contributed to gender equality and women's point of view in the field of literature. The main purpose of this study is to analyze gender relations and discuss perceptions or views on the expression of 'beautiful' for Indonesian women in the novel "Beauty is a wound" by Eka Kurniawan. In connection with the results of this study,

the researcher hopes for further research to define the term "beautiful" in other characters in more depth.

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