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Social Abject(ion) and Subjectivity in "Dongeng Penebusan", A Short Story by Mona Sylviana

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ABSTRACT

"Dongeng Penebusan" is a short story by Mona Sylviana (Mona), an Indonesian woman writer. Conveyed through dual narration, it raises the theme of social abject(ion) that centers around two characters, Samsu, who wants to redeem his past, and his ex-lover Laksmi, whom he left years before. Combining a feminist approach and close reading, we aim to 'listen' to voices articulated through the dual narrative technique and the poetic language, which fuses the symbolic and the semiotic. Whereas Samsu is presented as verbally active, Laksmi is depicted as a silent woman who moves in a limited space and motion. Laksmi's seemingly passive attitude manifests her active subjectivity. In the story, the dual narration regulates voices by weakening Samsu's voice and amplifying Laksmi's subjective and authoritative voice. The poetic is employed to depict the unspeakable, atrocious abject situation. The story presents social abjection as an experience that involves specific strategies and degrees of rejection and acceptance. "Dongeng Penebusan" exemplifies how through her agency woman uses non-violence to maintain subjectivity and reject the presence of a male abject while denigrating his subjectivity.

Keywords: Agency, dual narration, feminist criticism, social abject(ion), subjectivity, the poetic

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly discourse on abject(ion) in Indonesian culture and literature is mostly, if not all, concerned with the corporeal/maternal and Creed's (1993) concept of "the monstrous-feminine." Dirgantoro (2017), for example, approaches the representation of the female body in the works of the female Balinese visual artist Murniasih from the perspective of the monstrous feminine. In film studies, Siddique (2002) and Wilger (2016) discuss the cinematic embodiment of the feminine in films about Sundelbolong, a supernatural

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female spirit believed to exist in Indonesian cultures. In literature, Darmawan et al. (2015), Suhendi et al. (2017), and Nariswari and Yoesoef (2018) examine how the monstrous feminine in the novels studied transgresses patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality. Despite the different objects (visual art, film, and novels) and analysis methods, these studies are linked by their focus on the physicality and visuality of the abject.

This article presents a feminist reading of "Dongeng Penebusan" (2015), a short story by the Indonesian woman writer Mona Sylviana (Mona), which marks a shift from the dominant notion of physical abject(ion) to social abject(ion). The abject(ion) in the story is caused by a situation related to the attempted coup of September 1965, known as the September 30 Movement (Gerakan 30 September/G30S), an event allegedly orchestrated by the PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party). The nocturnal putsch killed six generals and one lieutenant and was followed by the arrests, abductions, disappearances, and killings of those believed to be proponents of or associated with the PKI.

A body of works connected in one way or another with the issue of the G30S is written by male and female writers. Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, for example, talks about the relationship between a man and a dancer and how the political situation in the 1960s affected the lives of people in the village where they live. There are also works (fictional and non-fictional) written by women, e.g., Sudjinah and Sulami, who were imprisoned because of alleged leftist affiliation. More recent works written by woman writers include Laksmi Pamuntjak's *Amba* (2012) and Leila S Chudori's *Pulang* (2013). According to Downes (2018, p. 114), the novels counter the "dominant government narratives" (p. 114) concerning the communist in Indonesia. Similarly, Mayasari-Holvert (2021) regards the two novels as "little narratives" that intervene in the dominant narrative about 1965. "Dongeng Penebusan" differs from the works of these authors in that although it bears some reference to the G30S, the issue is not the main concern. In the story, Mona is more concerned with the abject situation that the historical event causes in the personal life of the female character.

"Dongeng Penebusan" is also about female subjectivity, an important topic in Indonesian literature. Various studies have explored the issue as it is portrayed in novels by male writers in the 1920s (Arimbi, 2014), in works by the female writer Suwarsih Djojopuspito in the 1940s-50s (Priyatna, 2018), in more recent works by woman writers published after 2000 (Dhewy, 2015; Hatley, 1999). These studies reveal that women have always lived in predominantly patriarchal societies. However, as presented in the works discussed, women have shown various degrees and manifestations of awareness of their situation, agency, sexuality, subjectivity, and autonomy. However, only Dhewy (2015) touches on the abject, though in passing without exploring it further.

As for Mona's works, Watson (2011) approaches them from the perspective of abject(ion). In his review of the *Wajah Terakhir* anthology, Watson praises Mona for consistently writing about the experiences of women from different backgrounds. Mona highlights various types of discrimination, oppression, and marginalization against women in a squeamish world (Watson, 2011). Using a style Watson calls "dirty realism" (Watson, 2011, p. 136), Mona draws the reader to see the dark realities (oppression, blood, and venereal disease) as part of women's experience. In Priyatna's (2011) reading, Mona captures the darkest desires, scabs, ugliness, and transgressions of norms and orders, while, in so doing, underlying that abnormality is part of daily normality. Priyatna (2011) categorizes the different types of abjection presented in the stories. However, Watson's and Priyatna's general review of the collection lacks detailed textual and narrative analysis of the individual stories. Commentaries by Muhammad (2012) and Adha (2013), which appeared as newspaper articles, are based on their overall reading of the *Wajah Terakhir* collection. Their articles neither provide detailed textual analysis nor touch on the abject(ion) issue presented in several of Mona's works.

The above discussions on Mona's stories leave a gap allowing us to approach abject(ion) differently. First, while previous studies on abject(ion) focus on films, visual art, cultural representations, and practices concerning abject(ion), our study focuses on a short story, which requires a particular reading and analysis method. Secondly, instead of discussing maternal and physical abjection, we investigate its social dimension, how a socially abject situation affects subjectivity at a personal level, and what it means to face a non-physical abject situation. Thirdly, whereas literature depicting physical aspects of the abject employs generally (visual) imagery, portraying social abjection requires a specific set of textual/narrative strategies. The article explores how the semiotic blends with/into the symbolism of depicting social abject(ion).

"Dongeng Penebusan," we maintain, is important to discuss because the issue of social abject(ion) is still under-researched compared to that of physical/maternal abject(ion). In addition, "Dongeng Penebusan" is a short story that requires Mona to employ a specific narrative craft to portray the complexity of an abject situation within the limited length of a short story. In addition, although Mona's story bears some reference to the 1965 tragedy, she is more concerned with its impact on the personal experience of a woman affected by it. Through the story, Mona articulates a voice muted in history and offers a more gender-aware account of women's adversity during the political turmoil.

Our article aims to explore the forms of social abject(ion) portrayed in the story by looking at the relation, (inter) action, and reaction between characters, which are presented not only through the language used in the narrative description and the characters' conversation but also

through poetic language, a concept Kristeva explicates in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Kristeva, 1984). We also delve into how the female character uses her agency to (re)claim her subjectivity. Our analysis follows Tyler's (2009) appeal to shift from Kristeva's (1980/1982) physical/maternal abject(ion) to social abject(ion).

Literature Review

Mona Sylviana: In and on (Post-) Reformasi Indonesian Literature. Born in Bandung on May 16, 1972, Mona Sylviana (Mona) was among the forty-five Indonesian writers whose works were exhibited at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2015. 2017 Mona flew to France to attend a writer residence program co-organized by the Indonesian National Book Committee and the Ministry of Education and Culture. In 1995, Mona received an award from *Femina*, an Indonesian women's magazine, for her short story "Masterpiece." Her nonfiction work "Pantai Tanjung Bira, Keindahan Sang Penyendiri" (Tanjung Bira Beach, The Beauty of the Loner"), a travel writing which appeared in *Koran Tempo* newspaper on May 10, 2015, also received an APWI (Indonesian Tourism Journalist Award) the Ministry of Tourism. Mona's works have been published in the following anthologies: *Pesan Ombak Padjadjaran* (1993), *Improvisasi X* (1995), *Angkatan 2000 dalam Sastra Indonesia* (2000), *Dunia Perempuan: Antologi Cerita Pendek Wanita Cerpenis Indonesia* (2002), *Living Together* (2005), *Wajah Terakhir* (2015), *A Tale of Redemption & Other Stories* (2015). "Dongeng Penebusan" first appeared in *Koran Tempo* newspaper and later in the trilingual anthology *A Tale of Redemption & Other Stories* (2015).

Mona belongs to a group of Indonesian women writers who have set the development of Indonesian literature since *Reformasi* (Reform) in 1998. *Reformasi*, which began soon after the fall of Soeharto, was marked not only by the rise of *Sastra Reformasi* (Reform Literature), whose proponents frankly criticized the government (Aveling, 2007) but also by the publication of prose works by several young women writers who have not only enriched Indonesian literature in their respective ways but also brought women's issues from the periphery to the center. In addition, the emergence of these women writers also introduced new ways of narrating since women's problems can be best expressed through women's language as an avenue for women to (re)claim their subjectivity.

In Mona's words, women must have some liberty to experiment, explore, dismantle, and be "playful" with language to enable it to expose "other worlds," which need to be recognized by both men and women (Sylviana, 2008, August 8). Remaining co-opted in a world created by/for men would make a woman lose the ability to make sense of her world, become estranged from herself, and be linguistically silenced. For Mona, writing about a woman's unique experience means a venture to find a language of her own and a channel to articulate her otherwise unheard voice. Despite her writer awards

and national and international readership, Mona's works have yet to be explored. Mona and her works deserve critical attention. How Mona combines narrative style and use of language to present feminist themes and unfold women's unique and personal experiences through her stories offers further critical exploration.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The plot of the story can be briefly summarized as follows. One evening, an elderly man named Samsu enters a coffeehouse run by Laksmi. When still young, Samsu left Laksmi and remained in hiding as Laksmi was raped by some army soldiers searching for Samsu. The military believed Samsu was avoiding arrest after an allegation of his involvement with the Communists. The story is told as a dual narration using third- and first-person perspectives. The former revolves around the abject situation in the coffeehouse, whereas the latter flashes back to the night of their separation.

In the coffeehouse, Samsu converses with some younger male regulars and tells about a young man who once left his lover. No account of Laksmi's rape and how Samsu tells the story is given. In the second narration, Samsu's past and what happened to Laksmi are implied. The story does not mention how Samsu's presence and story disturb Laksmi's subjectivity. Her perturbed subjectivity is suggested implicitly through her silence and gestures of avoidance. That the young man in Samsu's story is his younger self is made implicit rather than explicit.

Stopping before Samsu tells his story, the first narration is succeeded by the second. This first-person narration recounts what happened on the tragic night. The '*I*'—young Samsu—enters Laksmi's bedroom to hide, but some soldiers, led by the "commandant," search the house. Samsu sneaks out and hides nearby, where he can still hear objects banging and breaking. He can also hear cloth being torn as Laksmi's sobs become feeble. Samsu remains in hiding and will never be seen again until he arrives at the coffeehouse. Laksmi's name is never mentioned. She is referred to only as "the waitress," "the woman behind the counter," or "the old woman." Her identity is revealed at the end of the story when Samsu approaches the counter to settle his bill, and Laksmi speaks for the first and only time, telling Samsu not to come again.

Our approach to the work is framed by the theoretical perspective of the abject from Kristeva (1980/1982) and social abjection from Tyler (2009), which we briefly outline as follows. Abjection refers to the repulsing of that which is disgusting: blood, vomit, feces, or anything that threatens our "clean and proper" self and (social) acceptability (Kristeva, 1980/1982, p. 8). The abject is unwanted because it "beseeches and pulverizes the subject" (McAfee, 2004, p. 46). Abjection, however, does not guarantee a subject's stability, for after being driven out, the abject "hovers at the periphery," and abjection recurs (p. 46). One characteristic of the abject is its ability to create ambiguity and ambivalence. Texts on abjection provide examples of how the abject can cause disgust and fascination.

Kristeva's theory, however, has been criticized by Imogen Tyler (2009) on account of the "matricidal premise on which it is grounded" (p. 78). Tyler advocates for discussions about abject(ion) to expand the concept and shift it toward social context, for abjection is not only about the maternal (body). Maternal/corporeal abjection is "a specific variety of the abject" (Goodnow, 2010, p. 43). Abjection is polyvalent and can manifest in social discourses concerning social (im)purity (Duschinsky, 2013). Abjection does not always concern its primary meaning. Kristeva maintains that abjection occurs not because of uncleanliness and unhealthiness (the cause) but because of the condition's disturbance against identity, system, and order. The abject, therefore, can have a non-physical (social) form. The rejection of "the social appearance of the abject" (Kristeva, 1980/1982, p. 16) is referred to as "social abjection" (Tyler, 2009, p. 94).

Social abjection concerns human behavior, attitude, and character. Therefore, betrayal, lies, hypocrisy, and crime are abject because being "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" can potentially expose the fragility of the law (Kristeva, 1980/1982, p. 4). For Goodnow (2010), the abject arising from hypocrisy is "the abject which presents with a clean, false face" (p. 28). It is loathsome and perverse, for "it never gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law: but turns them aside, misleads corrupts, uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (Kristeva, 1980/1982, p. 15).

Abjection is "tied to language" (Czarnecki, 2009, p. 52), for it extrudes the abject out of the boundaries of signs (Kristeva, 1980/1982). Literature about abjection tends to pervert language, style, and content and transgress boundaries of binaries like purity-impurity, morality-immorality, and self-other (Kristeva, 1980/1982). Kristeva pays particular attention to avant-garde literature, characterized by semiotic drives associated with both the maternal and the abject (Cavanagh, 1993; Oliver, 2012).

Semiotic drives can be traced back to the stage before an infant develops subjectivity, when signification occurs non-linguistically in the semiotic, "articulated by flow and marks" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 40), and rhythm and tones (Oliver, 1997). As Chanter asserts, the semiotic is "characterized by motility, by the movement of energies and drives" (quoted by Arya, 2014, p. 161). In this pre-verbal state, signification does not follow the Lacanian concept of the symbolic, which acts as the paternal law that structures all linguistic signification and "becomes a universal organizing principle of culture" (Butler, 1988, p. 104).

When a child abjects the mother to become a separate subject, it begins to make sense of its world through language governed by the symbolic. Whereas the semiotic works "through elision, repetition, mere sound and multiplication of meaning" (Butler, 1988, p. 107), the symbolic structures the world by instating univocal, discrete meaning while "suppressing multiple meanings" (p. 105) that the semiotic potentially produces. Relation between drives, language, and

patriarchal prerogative can offer a strategy of subversion. The symbolic will remain hegemonic unless it is disrupted by the diversity of meanings evoked by the semiotic.

The infusion of the semiotic into the symbolic results in a moment of distortion, rhetorical figures, rhythms, and alliterations, which constitute poetic language. The capability of poetic language to break down barriers is central to literary transgression and abjection. Texts of abjection remind one of what societies have rejected for their stability (Booker, 1991, p. 148). Transgression and subversion in texts are abject because they defy order, identity, stability, and boundaries and disturb the reader's sense of what is proper and improper.

To dismantle abject(ion) in the story, we use a method that combines a feminist approach concerning (social) abjection and a close reading that combines close reading a feminist perspective and a close reading method that takes into account all textual components (words, phrases, clauses, fragments, and sentences) to unfold the explicit and implicit meanings they convey. We focus on how it portrays the characters and their interaction (abjection). In addition, since the story uses a double narrative technique, we consider the perspectives from which each part is told and what the use of the technique implies. Our article is also concerned with the issue of subjectivity, in which the characters' voices are important. Particular attention must be paid to hearing the different voices and how they are articulated explicitly and implicitly through verbal and non-verbal expressions, which Kristeva calls 'poetic' language (Kristeva, 1974/1984).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We present our analysis of the modes of abjection shown by the main characters and how they, particularly Laksmi as the female protagonist, deal with their disturbed subjectivity. Subsequently, we look into using the dual narrative technique and the poetic language as Mona's means to regulate voice.

In the story, Samsu faces his abject past, Laksmi in Samsu's presence, and the young guests with the young man in Samsu's story. Samsu appears in the coffeehouse to unload the burden shaking his subjectivity. Samsu's daunted subjectivity is suggested by the signs of anxiety shown through a combination of telling and showing. As the narrator explicitly discloses, Samsu has behaved with feigned politeness since his entrance into the coffee shop. As the story shows, when the guests turn their faces to him upon his arrival, he smiles "just to affect cordiality" (Sylviana, 2015, p. 123). Similarly, when a man asks him to order coffee, he smiles and moves his head "as if nodding" (p. 124). The adverbials used in the narration unmask Samsu's concealed anxiety while portraying him as an abject with "a clean, false face" (Goodnow, 2010, p. 28).

Samsu's anxiety is further implied through the descriptions of his gestures. When asked upon parting with the young guests if he is coming again the following evening, Samsu gives no reply but "stubbed

out his cigarette on the ashtray [r]epeatedly" (Sylviana, 2015, p. 134). Similarly, when Samsu's listeners express their abjection of the young man in his story, Samsu says nothing but takes such a long puff that smoke fills his lungs. The repetitive description of Samsu's movements is the text's way of highlighting his anxiety and reaction to his being abjected by his audience. Although Samsu assumes an air of friendliness and respectability, his anxiety and two-facedness come to light through the description of his bodily gestures and the use of commentary adverbials. By contrasting Samsu's outward and inward attitude, Mona provides a narrative indication of his disquieted subjectivity, which is intact to his audience but is frail to Laksmi and the omniscient third-person narrator.

Samsu is abjected, though indirectly, by his listeners. The reverence with which they treat Samsu is attributed to their innocence of his past. From Samsu's perspective, pouring out his past can be equated to self-cleansing. His past is a pollutant that he hopes to clean by confessing. Nevertheless, he tells his redemption story without revealing his identity, hence the audience's abjection.

Samsu's audience reacts to his story with contempt. Two men express it by cursing and another by saying he suddenly wants to go home and see his wife (Sylviana, 2015, p. 133). The use of swear words implies their repugnance toward young Samsu and their unawareness of Samsu's identity. Here, the story indicates two different modes of abjection, verbal cursing and the emergence of a sudden desire to leave the place. Samsu is repulsed not only by his past and the other guests but also by Laksmi, who uses several modes of abjection to shun him. First, Laksmi maintains a spatial distance as a mode of abjection. With Samsu becoming the center of attention, the guests' area becomes not only a gendered space but also an abject space, which Laksmi avoids by remaining seated in her marginal space behind the counter. Laksmi approaches the men's table only when she needs to. Avoidance of the abject space is also marked by temporality. Laksmi's presence near Samsu is always brief, followed by her immediate retreat to her seat: "*Like four days before*, the waitress *immediately* withdrew" (p. 124, our emphasis). The idea of temporality is strengthened by repetition. The action of resuming her seat is repeated three times in the story (pp. 124, 125, 127).

The combined use of time and place adverbials thus asserts the significance of navigating spatiotemporality as a mode of abjection. As Becker-Leckrone (2005) asserts, abject(ion) always "involves a crisis of place" (p. 32), and space/spatiality is always related to temporality (Massey, 1994). Mona's repetitive expressions of the action-place-time triad indicate the important relation between abject(ion) and spatiotemporality and the significance of navigating spatiotemporality as a strategy of abjecting and maintaining subjectivity.

The second strategy concerns silencing. Laksmi keeps a radio to silence the men's conversation (Sylviana, 2015). Reference

to the radio appears a couple more times in the story, accentuating its silencing function. It needs more than one action for Laksmi to abject Samsu. Even so, Samsu's presence, voice, and story linger and continue to impinge on her subjectivity. As the narrator says, the radio's sound is "faint" and does not mute the men's conversation. After all, Laksmi is the waitress, and Samsu is her guest. Turning up the volume would mean disrespecting all the guests. Laksmi's subjectivity as an abandoned woman overlaps with her position as a waitress who must serve her customers. Samsu's presence compels Laksmi to negotiate spatiotemporality and her layered subjectivity.

The third strategy is silence, which, though generally regarded as a form of passivity and submission in the masculine binary view of gender, is portrayed otherwise. From the beginning, it is Samsu who is presented as active. He dominates the conversation and becomes the center of attention. Laksmi's silence is active, not passive, for she negotiates the situation rather than confronting Samsu before the other guests. It is even Laksmi who finally breaks the silence. The only exchange between them occurs at the end of the story when Samsu is settling his bill. Laksmi's only words are responded to with a short apology. Before he even says a word, Laksmi expels him by saying "You don't need to come again, *Bang*…." (Sylviana, 2015, p. 143).

Laksmi's polite expression is not harsh in tone. She still calls him *bang*, shortened from '*abang*.' '*Abang*' has several meanings: older brother, a form of address for an older male. Additionally, '(*a*)*bang*' is frequently used by a woman as an intimate address for her lover/spouse. Laksmi's word use suggests her admission of her romantic past with Samsu. Yet, spoken by a woman facing an abject person, it implies strength and composure. The mixture of a sense of intimacy and a prohibitive (i.e., abjecting) speech act reflects a compromise between her subjectivity as an ex-lover, betrayed woman, and a coffeehouse keeper, portraying abjection as a complex situation. By breaking her silence, Laksmi does not put herself as an object. Speaking is not a sign of her willingness to reconnect with Samsu. She speaks before he says a word because she does not want him to speak. Her utterance is not a friendly gesture but an imperatively prohibitive speech act charged with authority and subjectivity. Mona's treatment of silence embodies a characteristic of "abject literature" (Arya, 2014, p. 158) in that it provides an example of "productive silence" (Walker, 1998, p. 66) and "silence that speaks" (p. 127).

Mona's portrayal of abject(ion) reflects two characteristics of the abject: that it can never be totally expelled and that it is ambiguous. As Kristeva (1980/1982) maintains, "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (p. 2); "it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger" (p. 9). In McAfee's (2004) words, "[w]hat is abjected is radically

excluded but never banished altogether. The abject hovers at the periphery of one's existence, constantly challenging one's tenuous borders of selfhood" (p. 46). Laksmi stays away from the men's area but is still inside the coffeehouse. She even approaches the men's table a few times. She cannot utterly abject Samsu, for he is a customer she must serve. Laksmi and Samsu hover nearby, lurking and threatening each other's subjectivity.

The dual nature of the abject is reflected in the extent to which the abject is partially accepted rather than wholly repelled. (Young) His audience abjects Samsu, yet he endures their rejection until he finishes his story. As Creed (1993) points out, "abjection is always ambiguous" (p. 10), evoking "loathing and fascination" (Kutzbach & Mueller, 2007, p. 8). In the coffeehouse, Samsu experiences abjecting and being abjected. Telling the story about his past can be equated to excreting filth. It is disgusting, yet simultaneously, it gives him two pleasures: one that results from self-cleansing and another from the respectful treatment of his audience. Samsu needs the other guests to listen to his story because he cannot face Laksmi. When his audience curses the young man in his story, Samsu endures it by inhaling his cigarette deeply into his lungs. The curse is compensated by the smoking pleasure. This action again emphasizes that rejection and acceptance—if not pleasure—occur at the same time and that abject(ion) has a paradoxically dual nature (Kristeva, 1980/1982).

Similarly, Laksmi faces the dual nature of abject(ion) in that she endures the situation but benefits from it. The transactions from the sales of coffee and cigarettes give her the benefit (pleasure) that comes together with loathing. She can still hear them—hence the radio. The story shows negotiation as part of the formation of subjectivity. Laksmi's complex subjectivity is depicted through how it has to be constantly negotiated. Lakmi must grapple with her double identity as a woman in an abject situation and as a coffeehouse keeper whose duty is to maintain good relations with her consumers. Her mixed subjectivity prevents her from openly abjecting Samsu in the presence of the other guests.

As for the younger customers, despite their revulsion at young Samsu, they enjoy the old man's presence and are eager to hear how the story ends. They compete to please Samsu and hear the continuation of the story Samsu did not finish a few nights before. The young men respect Samsu by preventing him from being uncomfortable. For example, a man rebukes another man named Buton for asking Samsu to continue his story immediately: "Hey, Buton. Can't you see that our *Bapak* here hasn't finished smoking his cigarette?" (Sylviana, 2015, p. 124). The man does not want anyone to give an impolite impression of Samsu. The form of address *Bapak* (father) is modified by the possessive "our," indicating their acceptance of Samsu. This attitude is strengthened when a man wrapped in a sarong rushes to bring an ashtray and a glass of coffee to Samsu's table while another turns down the television

so they can get the pleasure of listening to his story.

As mentioned earlier, the discussion about the short story also blends the symbolic and the semiotic to create the poetic. Other than repetition, as described earlier, the poetic is manifested through fragments. The absence of syntactic incompleteness in the text does not conceal meaning but provides a context from which meaning emerges. An important use of such a style appears in the passage about the night of the rape: "*Mosquitos swarming ... Buzzing ... They entered the kitchen. A pot fell. A banging sound. Laksmi's voice holding her sobs. Close ... Sound of cloth being torn*" (Sylviana, 2015, pp. 130–132, originally italicized).

The passage is presented plainly without any adverbials to describe the situation and create a tone. The fragment suggesting Laksmi's rape is devoid of tone. The absence of Laksmi's rape scene implies that the vicious crime is abject(ed). However, the short interval between pauses creates a kind of "staccato" and "thrill" (Kristeva, 1980/1982, pp. 194–195) that defy grammatical and syntactic rules (Becker-Leckrone, 2005) and heightens the tension. Mona's use of the poetic is also shown by the apparent forms of silence in the story. Silence can be described as avoidance of language. Samsu dominates the story with language, but his language is hypocritical because his attitude betrays his words. Laksmi, on the other hand, is silent.

Laksmi's silence is active because it 'speaks' through the accompanying non-verbal actions. Laksmi 'speaks' not with language but with her attitude. Her repetitive acts of avoidance are expressed through the narrator's words, but what such repetition signifies is not described. It lies in the resulting rhythm, emphasizing that meaning also can come from what escapes language. The text does not indicate whether Laksmi forgives Samsu. Laksmi's non-response to Samsu's apology bespeaks that his subjectivity is not restored but remains disrupted.

Another intriguing feature of the text is its dual narrative structure. The first part, conveyed by a third-person omniscient narrator, spans from Samsu's arrival to the point before he tells his story. There is no account of how Samsu tells his redemption story. The narration is abruptly taken over by the second part, which uses a first-person perspective and is written in italic. On the one hand, using the first pronoun, "I," which refers to Samsu, gives the impression that Samsu is the narrator and therefore has authority as the subject of the narration. On the other hand, however, the juxtaposition of the two types of narration suggests otherwise. Such dual narration implies the presence of a 'grand' narrator who has 'access' to Samsu's mind and uses the first-person pronoun on behalf of the character whose mind is 'overridden.' Such narrative switching is not uncommon in Mona's texts, for it can also be found in Mona's "Mata Andin," "Perjalanan Hujan," and "Mata yang Menyala" (all from the collection *Wajah Terakhir*, Sylviana, 2011).

In this way, the narration creates an impression that the narrator exposes the innermost thoughts that the character conceals. The information untold in the first narration is revealed in the second. The juxtaposition of both narratives leaves a gap from which two things can be inferred. First, Samsu abjects his past, and by doing so, he does not tell the truth to his listeners who, ignorant of his true self, refer to the young man in the story as 'he' and curse before Samsu himself. Second, the "grand" narrator is not neutral but takes Laksmi's side. Not only does the dual technique disrupt Samsu's subjectivity as a respected person in the first part, but it also weakens his voice. At the same time, the technique amplifies the already subjective and authoritative feminine voice that Laksmi carries through her silence.

Based on our reading, Mona shows two contrasting portrayals of abjection. On the one hand, Samsu's abjectness arises from within himself. Samsu's manner of abjection is masculine in that it objectifies Laksmi. On the other hand, Laksmi's abject is Samsu. Her modes of abjection are feminine in that they are non-violent and defensive rather than offensive. Samsu's attitude does not win him the redemption and forgiveness he seeks. Although gnawed all along, Laksmi's subjectivity is maintained and reclaimed. Mona's treatment of the two characters signifies her espousal of the feminine.

"Dongeng Penebusan" is an abject story that defies telling and verbal expressions. While the abject/monstrous discussed in the previous studies mentioned earlier (Darmawan et al., 2015; Nariswari & Yoesoef, 2018; Siddique, 2002; Suhendi et al., 2017; Wilger, 2016) is physical and therefore tangible, the abject aspects in Mona's story are intangible and defy expressions. Mona's craft of relying on showing rather than telling and creating gaps and rhythm exhibits the characteristics of fusion between the symbolic and semiotic envisioned by Kristeva (1980/1982). The double narrative technique and the rhythm produced by Mona's use of language suggest the impasse resulting from the limitation of the patriarchally structured symbolic language. Our discussion complements Priyatna's (2011) categorization of the abject by elaborating on the modes of abjection shown in Mona's story. "Dongeng Penebusan" is Mona's way of unraveling experiences and voices muted in history.

CONCLUSION

"Dongeng Penebusan" presents various forms of abject(ion). Samsu is faced with triple abjection. First, he is abjected by his past as he disassociates himself from his younger self. Second, he is abjected by his audience, disgusted by the young man in his story. Third, he is abjected by Laksmi. In the story, abjection takes the form of telling a story, the act of clean(s) ing, navigating spatiotemporally, silencing, and silence. Narratively, the abject(ion) theme is strengthened through repetitions of expressions and actions. The staccato resulting from fragmented structure, pauses, and repetition bears a characteristic of 'the poetic,' the fusion between the semiotic and symbolic.

Silence is responsible for the absence of details about Samsu, Laksmi, and their past. Laksmi is silent about herself and her past, but Samsu is not. He tells about it partially, being silent about his and his past. His dissociating himself from his younger self causes his audience to respect him while abjecting the young man. Samsu's being untruthful prevents him from being purged. Instead of receiving forgiveness, he is abjected verbally by Laksmi.

Abject(ion) in the story is closely related to the issue of subjectivity. Samsu's subjectivity is shaken by his abject past. When telling his story, his subjectivity is fractured because he detaches himself from his younger self. His subjectivity remains shaken when Laksmi does not respond to his apology and prohibits him from coming again. Laksmi's subjectivity is shaken by Samsu's presence and story. She maintains her subjectivity by negotiating between her identity as Samsu's ex-lover and someone in charge of the coffeehouse. Laksmi regains her subjectivity and autonomy by refusing to see him again and not responding to his apology. The story exemplifies silence and spatial navigation as non-violent means of abjecting and maintaining subjectivity.

In "Dongeng Penebusan," abjection involves specific strategies of rejection and certain degrees of acceptance. Mona's portrayal of Laksmi shows how subjectivity is reclaimed through different forms of abjection and how abjection is part of becoming a subject. Through the story, Mona brings the much-avoided issue of abjection to the center. "Dongeng Penebusan" is one of the stories where Mona's attention shifts from maternal and physical abjection to social abjection.

Through "Dongeng Penebusan," Mona shares an abject situation with her reader. The implicitness and lack of details in the story raise the difficult question of sexual violence perpetrated by those close to power. While the national tragedy itself is already abject, the sexual violence and the impact faced by many women are often trivialized, if not negated altogether. The limitations of the current discourse on (social) abjection in the context of Indonesian politics and history call for further discussions about abject(ion), the social, political, cultural, and historical landscape in which abject(ion) is framed, and how the issue is treated in other works by Mona or other writers.

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