

AN ANALYSIS OF HARYO PAMUNGKAS'S SHORT STORY 'THE OLD WRITER' AND ITS CORRELATION WITH THE OLD AGE OF INDONESIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

This study is motivated by a common phenomenon experienced by the elderly in Indonesia, namely the inner struggle of facing old age, the loss of identity, and social alienation, issues often overlooked in the social and emotional spheres. The purpose of this study is to analyze the short story *Penulis Tua* by Haryo Pamungkas and examine its correlation with the realities of elderly life in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was employed using structural and sociological literary analysis methods to uncover both the narrative meaning and social relevance of the literary text. The analysis reveals that *Penulis Tua* not only portrays aging as a personal experience marked by the loss of identity and role, but also represents the social condition of the elderly who are frequently neglected both economically and emotionally by those around them. The story highlights the elderly's need for appreciation, social acceptance, and meaningful roles within the family and community. The correlation between the reality depicted in the text and the actual social conditions of the elderly in Indonesia reinforces literature's role as a mirror of relevant social critique. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of fostering collective awareness to respect the elderly, value their contributions, and cultivate empathy toward the dynamics of aging amid ongoing social change.

Keywords: Haryo Pamungkas; Elderly; Old Age; Social Critique; Short Story
Penulis Tua

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a reflection of life, where literary works not only function as entertainment, but also as a medium to voice various social realities that occur in society. According to Plato, the world in literary works is an imitation of the real world of reality as well as the world of ideas (Cho et al., 2020). The world in literary works forms itself as a social world that is an imitation of the social world that exists in reality. Literary works can be considered as fictitious and imaginative forces to be able to directly capture social buildings directly (LAUMA, 2017). One of the literary genres that is closest to reality is short stories, because of its dense, straightforward, and ability to represent the complexity of human life in a limited narrative space (Aminuddin, 2018). In this context, short stories *Penulis Tua* Haryo Pamungkas work is one of the interesting works to analyze because it raises a theme that is rarely highlighted in depth, namely old age.

Old age is the final phase in the human life cycle which is characterized by various physical, psychological, and social challenges. In Indonesia, issues related to the elderly are increasingly relevant to be studied, considering the elderly population that continues to increase every year. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) for 2023 - 2024, the number of elderly people in Indonesia will reach 12% of the total population in the near future, making Indonesia a country with an aging society population. This figure has increased from 2022 which reached 10.48% (BPS, 2023). Based on the reality on the ground, it shows that many elderly people still face serious problems such as social isolation, loss of role in the family, and lack of respect for their existence. This is evidenced by the large number of news related to the elderly who are abandoned, killed, exiled to nursing homes and also others who are not well cared for, even having to work to meet their daily needs. So it is not surprising, in Dewi's research that the elderly are an important part of life to pay attention to (Dewi & Karja, 2023).

In the short story, the Old Writer depicts the main character who experiences an inner struggle as an elderly writer who feels marginalized and is no longer considered important by society. This representation can be seen as a reflection of the real conditions

experienced by many elderly people in Indonesia. Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply how this short story represents the psychological and social dynamics experienced by the main character, as well as how it correlates with the life of old age in Indonesian society more broadly.

This research seeks to understand the meaning and message contained in the short story through a structural and sociological approach to literature, but also to relate the content of literary works to real social conditions. Thus, literary works can be a bridge to increase public awareness about the importance of paying attention to the welfare and dignity of the elderly. This study is expected to enrich the treasures of literary analysis oriented to humanitarian and social issues, as well as become a material for reflection for readers and policymakers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the short stories of *Penulis Tua* by Haryo Pamungkas and their correlation with the old life of the people in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative research with a descriptive-analytical approach. Qualitative research is used because the object of study is in the form of a literary text, namely the short story *Penulis Tua* by Haryo Pamungkas, which is analyzed in depth based on its content, meaning, and social correlation. The descriptive-analytical approach aims to systematically describe the intrinsic elements in short stories and relate them to the reality of the old life of the people in Indonesia through a literary sociology approach (Arikunto, 2019). The main object of this study is a short story entitled *Penulis Tua* by Haryo Pamungkas. This short story is analyzed as a literary text that contains values, messages, and social realities, especially those related to old age. The observation of this study was carried out for two months, namely January to February 2025.

The data and data sources are based on two sources. The primary data source in this study is the content or complete text of the *Penulis Tua* short story. Secondary data sources are in the form of literary theory books, scientific journals, articles, and empirical data on the lives of the elderly in Indonesia that are relevant, such as reports from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the Ministry of Social Affairs, and other literature sources which are then strengthened by field observations around the elderly related to the elderly.

Data collection techniques are carried out through three things, namely: 1) Literature study, namely by reading, taking notes, and collecting references that are relevant to the short

story and the research theme. 2) Documentation, which is the collection of documents in the form of short story texts, articles, data reports on the elderly, and supporting theories. 3) Text analysis, namely reading and examining the content of the short story repeatedly to find the narrative structure, themes, characterizations, conflicts, and social messages (Lexy J Moleong, 2018). Meanwhile, data analysis is carried out in three stages, namely: 1) structural analysis: Examining the intrinsic elements of short stories such as themes, characters, plots, settings, and language styles. 2) Literary sociology analysis: Relating the content of short stories to the social context of society, especially issues of elderly life in Indonesia. 3) interpretation: Providing an interpretation of the symbolic meaning and moral message in short stories and arranging their correlation with the social phenomena of old life. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher uses the source triangulation technique, which is by comparing data obtained from short stories, literary theory, and social data from various sources. Validity is also strengthened by repeated reading of short stories and consistency of interpretation based on relevant theories.

RESULTS

Theme

In a story titled *Si Buku Penulis Tua* by Haryo Pamungkas, it is themed about a community life and with a memory of his past. This can be proven in a text of the following story quotes:

“Memories of the past are like puzzle pieces that begin to form one by one when contemplating. Memories of my youth with my late wife, or about the twists and turns of life I have lived”.

“No one is waiting for my writing anymore. The publisher didn't seem to know me. My name now lives only on the dusty shelves of a second-hand bookstore.” (Excerpt from the *Penulis Tua* short story)

This sentence shows the main character's feelings of marginalization, who feel that his existence is no longer appreciated. It illustrates a strong inner conflict, and highlights a psychological condition that is common in the elderly, namely loss of social role and existence.

Flow

In a story with the title of the old writer by Haryo Pamungkas, this also explains the plot they use, namely the mixed plot. It is said that a mixed plot can be proven in the following short story text excerpt. Short story text quote 1

"Memories of the past are like puzzle pieces that begin to form one by one when contemplating. Memories of my youth with my late wife, or about the twists and turns of life I have lived."

Short story text quotes 2

"Perhaps it is true, time continues to grow, memories continue to form, and times will continue to change. Can I miss past events that made me live more as a human being?"

Background

Then for the setting used in the short story with the title *Penulis Tua* by Haryo Pamungkas, it is located in a house, a garden near the square and twin bridges. The time setting used is in the morning, and in the afternoon. As for the atmosphere, it is quiet, calm and also crowded. To prove the background of the incident, there is the following quote.

Short story text quote 1

"The roads along the Twin Bridges are jammed, the roar of horns coming out of so many vehicles that are trailing like long snakes."

Short story text quotes 2

"And of course, it's rare for me to meet some people who wait for dusk here like me."

Characters and Characterization

In this short story, two characters are played by his grandfather and also his granddaughter named Alenia.

Viewpoint

In this story, the point of view is focused on the first person. To prove this point of view, it is found in the text of the following story quote. Short story text excerpts:

"I imagine how unexciting it will be when they are my age, what can I remember? If life is only spent in front of a box screen that can hold everything?"

Language style.

In accordance with the conversation between the existing characters, the language style used tends to use everyday language that is not so formal.

The Mandate

The Mandate is the message that the author conveys to the reader. The mandate contained in the short story "*Penulis Tua*" by Haryo Pamungkas is as follows:

"If we spend our lives just looking at a box screen that can hold everything, we won't know how beautiful it is to reminisce about such a fun past at a young age without knowing the outside world. Therefore, take advantage of your youth by multiplying beautiful memories".

DISCUSSION

Short stories or known short stories are one of the works that usually have meanings and messages (Haren, 2020). The short story "*Penulis Tua*" by Haryo Pamungkas is a literary work that reflects the psychological and social condition of an elderly character who grapples with self-existence in old age. Through an intimate narrative full of melancholy nuances, this short story raises issues relevant to social reality: aging, loneliness, loss of meaning, and the longing for recognition and usefulness. The central character in this short story is an elderly writer. He is described as a figure who was once productive and recognized in the literary world, but now faces a decline in his creativity, lack of attention, and uncertainty about his intellectual heritage. This figure represents many elderly people in Indonesia who feel marginalized after going through the productive period. This is as Syarifah researched that many elderly people feel not too cared for, so it is important to have understanding from family, relatives and also things from institutions related to the elderly (Abriza & Mariany, 2018).

Haryo Pamungkas uses a reflective and contemplative style of language. Through a choice of diction that is calm but full of emotional burden, readers are invited to dive into

the inner thoughts of characters who are bullied by loneliness. This nuance reinforces the impression that old age is not just about aging physically, but also a deep inner struggle to want to feel happy (Jamil et al., 2024). The conflict in this short story is not external, but more internal. The inner struggle of the character faces the fact that his work begins to be forgotten. The storyline flows slowly but strongly, revealing the characters' introspective routines, as well as limited interactions that imply alienation.

Some elements in short stories have symbolism, such as an old typewriter, a pile of manuscripts, or a dusty desk. All of these symbols depict the now muted traces of creative life (Fitriani & Febrieta, 2024). Here, Haryo Pamungkas conveys the existential meaning: humans long for meaning and recognition, even at the end of their lives. The condition of the characters in the short story reflects the reality of old age in Indonesia. Many elderly people experience alienation, especially after retirement. When their social role is considered complete, they often feel that they are no longer needed. The absence of an adequate support system exacerbates the situation.

Indonesian culture, which is known to uphold family values, is not always a guarantee of comfort in old age. In many cases, the elderly are left behind by their children who are busy with their own lives as the news on tiktok, tv and youtube even though it is not done by all children, only a few (Zahara & Anastasya, 2021). This phenomenon is increasingly evident in urban areas, where the value of individualism is increasingly strong. Just like the characters in the short story, many elderly people in Indonesia are experiencing an identity crisis. They were once important figures either as teachers, officials, or artists but in old age felt that they had lost their role (Albert et al., 2020). This shows that appreciation for the elderly is often temporary and not comprehensive.

This short story can also be read as a criticism of the lack of psychological and social support for the elderly. As individuals enter old age, physical and psychological changes should be balanced with adequate mentoring (Erika & Listyani, 2024). But in reality, many elderly people face this time alone. The characters in "*Penulis Tua*" show that the desire to remain remembered through work is a form of resistance to social death. In this context, writing becomes a kind of psychological defense mechanism to stay "alive" in the minds of others.

Through this short story, Haryo Pamungkas not only presents a personal story, but also conveys subtle social criticism of society's treatment of the elderly. Literature, in this

case, plays an important role in highlighting the aspects of humanity that are often overlooked by our social system. Some elderly people who have intellectual backgrounds like characters in short stories can still express their anxiety. But what about the majority of the elderly who do not have access to higher education or the ability to write? This shows that there is an inequality in voicing the needs of the elderly. Therefore, attention to the elderly, especially children to parents, is important, because they are the closest people (Raharja, 2024).

This short story implies the urgency to reintegrate the elderly into social life. The elderly are not only a burden, but also a source of wisdom and life that is bound to happen (Putri et al., 2022). There needs to be policies and a culture that opens up space for them to continue to contribute according to their capacity. Here many things reflect on how we treat our parents, how we ourselves imagine old age, and whether we have created a proper space for those who have preceded us in building this society. This is also in accordance with religious teachings that parents have educated from childhood so that children are obliged to honor their elderly parents (Hasan Assidiqi et al., 2023). This aims to know that the elderly are part of the family who want to be happy and feel together at the end of their lives.

In conclusion *The Penulis Tua* is a work that is simple in plot, yet strong in message. It becomes a mirror that shows the old face of our society between alienation and longing for meaning. Its correlation with the social reality in Indonesia is very relevant and touching, making us aware of the importance of building an age-friendly society, both structurally and culturally. The implications of this study teach to respect older people and appreciate all activities that are done, including accepting circumstances and also small activities that are done. Recommendations to complement this study include: first, a comparative study of literature on the theme of old age. Second, literary psychology research on the elderly focuses on the psychological aspects of characters in short stories that reflect existential crises, loneliness, or the search for meaning in old age.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a critical analysis of the short story *Penulis Tua*, examining its narrative elements, theme, plot, setting, characterization, perspective, and task to reveal how literary expression can reflect and critique social realities. The story's thematic focus on aging and identity loss is deeply embedded in the Indonesian cultural context, portraying the lived

experiences of elderly individuals who often face emotional and economic marginalization. Through its characters and narrative structure, the text not only conveys personal struggles but also mirrors broader societal attitudes toward aging, particularly the diminished appreciation and recognition afforded to the elderly within familial and social spheres.

The research makes a dual contribution to knowledge. Empirically, it presents narrative evidence that complements quantitative data and sociological surveys concerning perceptions of old age in Indonesia. Scientifically, it positions literature as a valuable qualitative resource for examining social marginalization, enabling deeper engagement with issues such as alienation, reduced social roles, and the search for meaning in later life. By contextualizing these experiences within urban cultural dynamics, the study highlights literature's capacity to serve as both a mirror and a critique of society.

Ultimately, this research affirms the importance of valuing older individuals and recognizing the relevance of their contributions, however modest they may appear. In doing so, it underscores literature's potential to foster empathy, cultural awareness, and social critique. The findings support further interdisciplinary exploration at the intersection of literature, sociology, and psychology to better understand the complexities of aging and social inclusion in contemporary contexts.

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