

Exploring Love and Islamic Value Between Ali and Amirah in Na'ima B. Robert's *She Wore Red Trainers*

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Abstract:

This study examines the representation of teenage love from an Islamic perspective through the novel *She Wore Red Trainers* by Na'ima B. Robert. The analysis focuses on the tension in the relationship between Ali and Amirah, which is examined using New Criticism Theory within the framework of Islamic values. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the researcher analyzes the dialogue, plot, and characters' thoughts through in-depth reading and data grouping. The findings show that love in this novel is not only emotional but also spiritual, reflecting affection based on faith, self-control, and respect. The commitment that is built develops into a form of moral responsibility and devotion. This novel emphasizes that love in Islam is a process towards spiritual maturity and self-discovery, not just a romantic relationship.

Keywords: love; islamic values; young love; new criticism

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi cinta remaja dalam perspektif Islam melalui novel *She Wore Red Trainers* karya Na'ima B. Robert. Fokus analisis tertuju pada ketegangan hubungan antara Ali dan Amirah yang ditelaah menggunakan Teori New Criticism dalam bingkai nilai-nilai Islam. Dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, peneliti menganalisis dialog, alur, dan pemikiran tokoh melalui pembacaan mendalam dan pengelompokan data. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa cinta dalam novel ini tidak hanya bersifat emosional, tetapi juga spiritual, mencerminkan kasih sayang yang berpijak pada keimanan, kendali diri, dan penghormatan. Komitmen yang terbangun berkembang menjadi bentuk tanggung jawab moral dan pengabdian. Novel ini menegaskan bahwa cinta dalam Islam merupakan proses menuju kedewasaan spiritual dan pencarian jati diri, bukan sekadar relasi romantis.

Kata kunci: cinta; nilai-nilai islam; cinta anak muda; teori kritik baru

INTRODUCTION

Complex love relationships between people, especially young people's love relationships, are still an interesting topic to analyze. Love itself means a form of emotion characterized by strong feelings of affection for another person formed from kinship, admiration, friendship to kindness (Decherney, 2024). Love also refers to a sense of sexual attraction to the opposite sex. Love has a big role in changing the way people think, act, and understand each other. Love can bring happiness to those who can control their



emotions. However, love can also bring sadness and difficulties to those who cannot control their emotions well. Love also serves as a bridge for young people to navigate the phase of emotional control, where the person learns about relationships, beliefs, and the process of self-discovery.

One of the most powerful relationships that shape human emotions and values is romantic relationships. Love is a source of happiness and inner turmoil that illustrates the complexity of human nature. From an Islamic perspective, young love has a special perspective that balances moral control and emotional bonds. Love is also a spiritual process that requires self-control in addition to physical attraction. According to the Qur'an, the relationship between men and women must be based on mutual respect and Islamic values. According to Surah Ar-Rum 30:21, Allah created love and affection between couples as a manifestation of His greatness.

This fascinating subject often employs literature as a lens to explore the intricate dynamics of relationships. One novel that offers the love theme is *She Wore Red Trainers* by Na'ima B. Robert. *She Wore Red Trainers* tells the story of Ali and Amirah who have different backgrounds. However, both of them have a dark past (Samya, 2014). This study focuses on the concept of young love within the moral boundaries of Islam as seen in the relationship between Ali and Amirah. The novel *She Wore Red Trainers* tells the story of love as a means of self-discovery within the constraints of Islamic values. However, the love story here is different from most teenage love stories that go beyond the boundaries of Islamic values. When they first meet and become close, their emotions bring them into conflict between Islamic morals and love. The author presents a realistic picture of how love can live outside of the dominant religion moral constraints in this London-set story, where there is still a great deal of friction between Islamic and Western cultural norms. They convey a tale of introspection, endurance, and emotional restraint rather than one of disobedience or longing.

A few previous studies have examined the same topic. Such as, Zahrin et al. (2018) who analyzed love, Islamic concepts and morals that occur in young people. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding the concept of love in Islam to overcome the romance problems experienced by young people. Razali (2022) also examined the Islamic values reflected in the relationship between the younger generation and the older generation. This study revealed that the relationship between the younger generation and the older generation is considered to comply with Islamic values where the actions are



carried out by parents to those who purely intend to serve Allah. Shufah examined the theme of love in Rumi's poem entitled *The Alchemy of Love*, which describes God's love for His creatures. This study used descriptive-qualitative methods and a literature review approach, as well as applying Ransom's New Criticism theory. Four thematic elements were found in the analysis results: ambiguity, irony, tension, and paradox. The phrase "alchemy of love," which means that love is something that can not only be changed but also cannot be explained, is ambitious. However, the paradox of love is defined as the relationship between imagination and reality (2016). Although, all of the previous studies examined the concept of Islamic love and New Criticism, the gap also exists in the works analyzed. Neither of them used the literary work entitled *She Wore Red Trainers*. As a result, this article can fill the gap by focusing on analyzing the young love between Ali and Amirah in the novel *She Wore Red Trainers*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of love in literature

Love is still a recurring motif in literature that has endured across time. According to Kanwar, love is the most powerful emotion and the thing that people want most in life till they finish their journey on this planet (2014). In literature, the subject of love is still very common. Love feels a little different from other topics because the plot of the story always has an unexpected conclusion. Due of its peculiarity, this topic keeps coming up throughout time. Other themes like violence, jealousy, grief, and hatred can occasionally accompany the topic of love.

Numerous literary histories document the evolution of love. Greek mythology is where the concept of love first appeared. The universe, according to the ancient Greeks, is full with conflicts and paradoxes. Humans were able to comprehend and accept the dual emotions of love and hate, which can occur at the same time, thanks to myths about love. Love has also been a motif in literature since its infancy, particularly in Greek mythology (Kanwar, 2014). The idea of love evolved over time in tandem with the advancement of human cognition. According to Lawrence Stone in Baumard et al., the rise of a new conception of love was "perhaps the most important change in thinking that occurred in the Early Modern period, and perhaps even in the last thousand years of Western history," (2022). In addition to being an intimate emotion shared by two people, love was also seen as a key factor in profound social and cultural change.



Economic, political, or social status factors were major factors in many marriages throughout European history. A different perspective, however, developed over time, holding that passionate love ought to be the acceptable and ideal foundation for marriage or other relationships. The perspective on marriage has undergone a significant transition, moving from one centered on duty or advantage to one centered on emotions and individual preference.

New Criticism

New Criticism is an aspect of literary studies that emerged in the 20th century as a rejection of traditional “extrinsic” methods, which typically interpret literary works through external aspects such as morals, philosophy, social conditions, economics, politics, history, or the author's personal life (Mambrol, 2021). New Criticism theory uses the main technique of careful and in-depth reading of texts. New Criticism views texts as independent works that must be understood through careful reading. This approach emphasizes that the meaning and delivery of a text are interrelated, and seeks to find unity and harmony behind elements that appear contradictory in literary works (Mambrol, 2021).

In New Criticism, the meaning of a text can be understood without considering the author's background and intentions or the reader's reaction. New Criticism focuses on the use of various literary devices such as metaphor, irony, tension, and paradox. This theory emphasizes the importance of “close reading” to understand a text by paying attention to the relationship between its form and meaning.

Islamic Values of Love

According to Islam, love (*mahabbah*) is a component of human nature. However, love must to be governed by Islamic law, which includes duty, purity, and spiritual purpose in addition to desire. The idea of love in Islamic philosophy encourages us to think about the underlying significance of each deed and interpersonal interaction. The primary factor influencing the relationship between people and Allah as well as between people and one another is love. If love is the foundation of any deed, word, or purpose, it has immense meaning. A person will live a more prudent and caring life if they comprehend the profound essence of love (Karimullah, 2023). Love for Allah is the basis of all other forms of love, including love for other human beings, family, and the natural world. Islam



emphasizes that love leads a person to goodness and closer to God (Allah), not to bad things.

Love is capable of changing a person to be more mature and wiser in facing difficulties in life with wisdom and maturity related to spiritual matters and human relationships. Therefore, we can change our minds about the choices we make to maintain the quality of life or destroy the quality of life that has been maintained. Love also has a big impact on human relationships, religion, philosophy, and society. Verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum, which reads, “And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may find tranquility in them,” supports this view. And He has placed compassion and mercy between you. There are undoubtedly indications for those who reflect in this. As a result, love in Islam includes profound moral and spiritual components in addition to being erotic.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with New Criticism as its approach. Qualitative research generally only includes data in words not numbers. Meanwhile, the descriptive qualitative approach itself was developed by Sandelowski as a research method intended to provide a complete picture of an event or experience. Ghorbani and Matourypour in Hall and Liebenberg state that “Descriptive qualitative emphasizes direct and information-rich descriptions of an event or experience without much theory or abstraction” (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). It focused on analyzing the elements of irony, tension, and paradox that form a unified meaning in the text. The data source for this study is the novel *She Wore Red Trainers*. Published in 2014, this novel tells the story of two teenagers struggling to understand faith, love, and identity amid the hustle and bustle of life in London. The data for this study was taken from dialogue excerpts in the novel that show inner struggles, moral pressures, and the combination of love and Islamic values. The data was then examined and categorized based on its role in building the theme and the beautiful composition of the story. These parts were chosen because they reflect important elements in the formation of unity of meaning in the work.

The data collection technique was carried out by reading deeply, recording, and grouping the text data. Each piece of data containing tension will be analyzed in depth to interpret the meaning involved in constructing the overall meaning in *She Wore Red Trainers*. This analysis is based on the principles of New Criticism, which states that the



integrity of a literary work is achieved through a balance between conflicting elements, or what is referred to as tension. Data analysis in this study is carried out in three main stages: (a) close reading, (b) meaning analysis based on the concept of tension, (c) interpretation of organic unity. Through these three stages, this study interprets the novel not only as a romantic story, but also as a literary work that harmonizes feelings and moral obedience.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The New Criticism theory is applied in this study with a focus on the concept of tension developed by Cleanth Brooks to examine the unity of meaning in the novel *She Wore Red Trainers*. Evidence of this tension emerges through the emotional and moral conflicts experienced by the main characters, Ali and Amirah. Ali and Amirah's strong feelings sometimes lead them to act outside Islamic values. However, both remain steadfast in their determination to uphold the Islamic values they have embraced. As a result of this tension, the novel presents a deeper understanding of love that is not merely lust, but also sacred because of faith in Allah. This study is organized to answer the following research questions: How is the conflict between teenage love and Islamic values depicted through the element of tension in the novel *She Wore Red Trainers*?

The Emergence of Emotional Desire

Amirah's inner turmoil arises when she first meets Ali on the basketball court, where her brother always plays basketball. Zayd, Amirah's brother always forbids Amirah to come to the basketball court when Zayd is playing with his friends, but that day, her mother told Amirah to look for Zayd, and that's where Amirah's inner turmoil arises. The evidence in the sentence:

All four of them turned towards me and, for a brief moment, the stranger's eyes met mine... It was as if his smile had eclipsed the sun; I wasn't aware of anything else, just shadows that made him shine even brighter. My heart flipped a couple of times and my mouth went dry.

This excerpt depicts Amirah's emotional reaction when she first saw Ali. The language used is full of imagery, such as in the phrase "his smile had eclipsed the sun," which symbolizes how Amirah's feelings overshadowed her own consciousness. Diction such as light, shine, and heart flipped shows attraction, while the phrase my mouth went dry shows a physical reaction to emotional excitement. In the view of New Criticism, this part forms one side of the tension, namely the natural emotional drive of human love. However, this



tension is then confronted with moral awareness that arises in the next part, creating an inner conflict that builds the beauty of meaning in the text.

Conflict between Desire and Moral Values

Amirah's attraction to Ali is not in accordance with the Islamic values they adhere to. The Islamic value of love is not to praise or build unnecessary conversations. This made Amirah immediately realize what she was doing. That is stated in the dialogue: "Astaghfirullah. What was I doing there again? Then I remembered: I was here for Zayd." Amirah's monologue above marks the emergence of conflict within Amirah's inner struggle. Falling under Ali's spell makes Amirah forget her main goal, but suddenly Amirah realizes her true goal is not to meet Ali, but to find her brother, Zayd. The expression "Astaghfirullah" becomes a symbol of spiritual awareness that emerges to restore her emotional awareness. The conflict between admiration and moral awareness forms the core tension in the novel. From a New Criticism perspective, this conflict is not merely an inner struggle, but an aesthetic device that provides harmony in meaning. The tension between sin and obedience, between desire and duty, makes this story more than just a teenage love story, it becomes a moral and emotional exploration of the meaning of true love.

Resolving Tension through Islamic Values

In Islam, dating is something that has a great potential to commit adultery. Islam itself prohibits Muslims from dating, which applies to all without exception. This Islamic value is also applied by the main characters in this novel. Marriage is the only halal way for them to feel the taste of dating, which is commonly called "dating with halal way". That is stated in the dialogue: "Muslims are not allowed to date, you know that. The only sanctioned relationship between a boy and a girl is within marriage." This sentence is the resolution to the tension that occurred earlier. If the previous section highlighted emotional tension and inner turmoil, this quote restores moral order through religious teachings. In the concept of New Criticism, this section serves as a conclusion that provides balance between two conflicting tensions: romantic stories and spiritual obedience. When these two sides finally achieve harmony, the text achieves what is called organic unity, namely a complete unity of meaning. This statement emphasizes that love is not rejected in Islam, but is directed and sanctified through legal marriage. Thus, this resolution does not eliminate emotion, but places it within the correct moral framework.



CONCLUSION(S)

She Wore Red Trainers narrates the story of young love in a journey of emotional and spiritual control limited by Islamic values. The New Criticism theory in this love story observes the tension in the relationship between Ali and Amirah by emphasizing emotional control and Islamic values. The harmony of their relationship grows from their shared understanding, the Islamic values they hold dear, and Ali's seriousness in marrying Amirah. This novel also depicts true love from an Islamic perspective, not only as an emotional attraction, but also as a spiritual bond that creates sincerity, respect, and devotion to Allah. Therefore, *She Wore Red Trainers* successfully combines love with Islamic values by emphasizing that love has a deeper meaning when it is based on faith.

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