

## THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMAN AS FEMME FATALE IN ROALD DAHL'S *LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER*

Hanum Bella Ardya Garini, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta,  
[hanumbellaq@gmail.com](mailto:hanumbellaq@gmail.com).  
Winarti, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta,  
[winasalim17@gmail.com](mailto:winasalim17@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to know the representation of woman as femme fatale in “Lamb to the slaughter”. The research methods of this study is a qualitative research method. The primary source of data is the “Lamb to the slaughter” short story, and the secondary source of the data is the main character Mary Malony. The result of this study shows that Mary became as a femme fatale is actually triggered by the conflict that occur between her and her husband. Knowing the fact that her beloved husband asks for a divorce when she is pregnant is not the right time. Mary, who is originally an innocent and normal wife, suddenly turns into a dangerous woman.

*Key words:*, *femme fatale*, *trigger*

### INTRODUCTION

Women in all aspects have many roles and characteristics that accompany them. There are also many types of women, who play their respective roles and have their own ‘color’. Although there are many stereotypes about women who think themselves should be like this and that, many of them eventually break it and make it slowly erased. However, in the end, the good and bad impression of women remains in society's judgment which is still difficult to remove. According to de Beauvoir (Indrasakti, 2018), women are divided into two kinds, there are Good and Evil. The characters represent the good woman such as the angel, patient wife, the good daughter, or the wise old woman. Meanwhile, the characters representing evil are the cunning wife, bad girl, or fatal woman. In this paper, the writer only focuses on the fatal woman character or better known as the femme fatale which represents the evil woman.

According to Wess Haubrich written on Medium.com on June 5, 2018, femme fatale is pure lethal beauty, but she is intelligent enough to use that beauty and her cunning and intellect to her advantage. The figure of femme fatale has been a remarkable figure throughout literature, art, or history and it has changed over time. Even so, there are two main keys that are closely related to these characters. According to Elhallaq (2015), despite the different portrayals of the femme fatal in literature, two of the keys features are always associated to her: a refusal to submit to conventional rules controlling the man-woman relationship, and she is amoral or beyond the common tradition of morality. However, in general, many people would easily assume that the femme fatale is a bad woman without considering the motive behind her actions.

In literature, the writer found it in a short story entitled *Lamb to the Slaughter*. *Lamb to the Slaughter* is a short story written by Roald Dahl in 1953. It fits into several genres, such as mystery, detective, and crime fiction. In short, the story is about a wife of detective, Mary Maloney, who kills her husband, Patrick Maloney because she feel betrayed. She can be said as the evil woman for her purpose to destroy the male character, her husband, Patrick Maloney.

The things that make the short story 'Lamb to the Slaughter' interesting to analyze because there is a dark comedy that inserted in this story. The protagonist uses a leg of the lamb as a weapon to hit her husband's head to death. Therefore, the topic that is discussed is the figure of femme fatale that represented by Mary Maloney in this short story.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative descriptive design is used to describe focusing on the details of what, where, when, and why an event or experience. The overall qualitative method utilizes interpretation through descriptive forms. Source of the data in this research is taken from "Lamb to the Slaughter" short story.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the short story 'Lamb to the Slaughter', the writer found several things that related to aspects of femme fatale's character. In this case, the writer focuses on one main character that is Mary Maloney. Mary is the wife of a detective that has a charming character, she is also pure and innocent. She really loves her husband and believes that he loves her too.

Firstly, Mary is portrayed as a beautiful and charming woman. It is depicted in the initial scene:

*"Her skin -for this was her sixth month with child-had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger darker than before."*

From the quotation above, it is shown that Mary is beautiful with pure white skin, soft lips, and beautiful eyes even though they are darker than before. She is also told as a woman who is six months pregnant. This can be referred to as a femme fatale character as mentioned in Webster dictionary that "*femme fatale is a woman who attracts men by an aura of charm and mystery*".

At the beginning of the story, Mary is also described as a wife who loves her husband very much. She serves her husband well. It can be seen in the following quotation:

*"She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in. ... She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a weak one for herself For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was*

*content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel - almost as a sunbather feels the sun - that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved the intent, far look in his eyes when they rested in her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken some of it away."*

From that, we can see that how much she loves her husband. Even in silence she still feels that feeling. However, everything suddenly changed. Patrick, her husband, tells her something that make her feel so surprised.

*"This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid," he said. "But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much." And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she stayed very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word. "So there it is," he added. "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way. Of course I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job."*

The quotation above is when Patrick tells Mary about something surprising. Although it is not clear what exactly he said, the writer got the point. From the sentences *"Of course, I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss."*, the writer assumes that what Patrick said is about divorce. He wants to separate from Mary. Besides that, the sentence *"And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way."* is also implies that he wants to divorce because he cheated with another woman, and he tells Mary when she is pregnant. So, the timing is not right.

This is the beginning where Mary become a bad figure later. After she listened to her husband's words earlier, she turned around to prepare supper for Patrick. However, Patrick refuses because he will be going out. When he will walk out, Mary followed behind him carrying a leg of lamb. Then, she hits her husband's head use it.

*"At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head. She might just as well have hit him with a steel club. She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet. The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of her shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands. All right, she told herself. So I've killed him."*

From the scene above, it is interesting to discuss, why Mary suddenly hits her husband's head to death, and why she uses the leg of a lamb as a weapon. The writer assumes many things dealing with it.

First, it is someone's natural instinct when she feels hurt. She felt that he needed to do something to get revenge so that the person who hurt her would be hurt too. In this case, the same could be true for Mary. After hearing her husband's statement asking them to divorce which hurt her, and remembering the fact that she loves him so much, Mary dares to do something beyond her wits: she kills Patrick. This also depicts a femme fatale character, where women have many motives for being that figure. Femme fatale can be the cause of male destruction, it can be physical destruction or social image destruction (Indrasakti, 2018). She can instantly turn deadly and do anything to achieve her goals, including killing men.

On the other hand, Mary feels betrayed by her husband. She must be thinking about why her husband could have the heart to cheat on her. Even though she had treated her husband so well, she even loves him very much. What's more, she is pregnant with their child. Because of that, she could suddenly turn into a bad figure due to that several reasons.

Then, why Mary uses the leg of a lamb to kill Patrick is actually funny. No wonder many people also say that it is a dark comedy. It is said to be a dark comedy because she uses the leg of a lamb which is not used as a weapon to kill people in general. So, the writer assumes that the reason Mary used the leg of lamb as a weapon was that at that time she was preparing supper for her husband and found the leg of lamb frozen in the refrigerator. Therefore, maybe because there was only that in front of her and remembering that her husband was about to go out, Mary finally took the leg of a lamb and brought it as a weapon to kill him.

What Mary does afterward is to think about all the possibilities that would come later. It can be seen in the quotation below:

*“It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill them both - mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?”*

From that, we can say that Mary thought in such a way how the consequences will be received. She does not really have a problem if should be punished for her actions, but she still thinks about her unborn baby. She is just afraid that her innocent baby would be put to death. Therefore, Mary thinks again.

*“She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lips and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street. It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.”*

In the end, she had a cunning idea relying on her intelligence. She acted as if everything was normal. She returned the leg of the lamb to the kitchen and put it in the oven. Then, she got ready to go out to the grocery shop. Mary drew up a script and ran a skit like she had to talk to a grocer and say she needed some ingredients to cook for her

husband's dinner because she tired enough to go out for dinner. Mary is really a manipulative figure.

*“... she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she'd become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn't expecting to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables. Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband. That's the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all.”*

As previously explained, Mary is categorized as a femme fatale, she is pure lethal beauty, but she is intelligent enough to use that beauty and her cunning and intellect to her advantage (Haubrich, 2018). She uses her cunning and intellect to manipulate the murder of her husband and covered herself as a suspect in an attempt to protect the baby, in which case she also has the advantage of avoiding punishment.

Not only that, she then calls the police which is also part of her scenario. She acts as natural as possible. She's crying and tell him to come quickly to her house.

*““Is he dead?” she cried.  
“I'm afraid he is. What happened?”*

*Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley who got up at once and hurried to the phone.”*

She's acting again, then she tells what her activities before Patrick was found dead. She tells them from the start, when Patrick came in, and she was sewing, and she was tired, so she did not want to go out to dinner. She also tells how she was going to put the meat in the oven and how she sneaked into the grocery shop to buy vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

After that, the officers began to work investigating the house. Searching for traces and weapons because they think the suspect isn't far away from leaving the evidence he used to kill Patrick from there. Mary was also questioned by officers about items that could potentially be the murder weapon.

After a while of searching. They decided to rest and have a drink. While in the kitchen, one of the officers found the oven was on and then informed Mary. In the end she even offered the leg of the lamb to the officers. They also eat while chatting and discussing who is the suspect behind this murder.

*“That's a hell of a big club the guy must've used to hit poor Patrick,” one of them was saying. “The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledgehammer.”*

*“That's why it ought to be easy to find.”*

*“Exactly what I say.”*

*“Whoever done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need.”*

*One of them belched.*

*“Personally, I think it's right here on the premises.”*

*“Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?”*

*And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.*

The quotation above is an ending scene. We can see how the officers guess who the killer is. They thought that the killer could not possibly carry the weapon. They also thought that weapon was around them, even in front of them. The funny thing is, when they were talking in the dining room, Mary overheard them from the other room. Hearing what they were talking about, Mary giggled. It can be seen in sentence *“And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle”*.

What does it mean? The writer assumes that she was giggling because she was happy to know that the weapon used as evidence had already been eaten by them. In addition, she also giggled because they were still guessing who the killer was and said that the evidence was in front of them. It also represents her as an evil woman, which she is happy when she gets her opponent distracted because of her actions.

It is also a sign that the ending of *Lamb to the Slaughter* can be said to be a cliffhanger ending where the last scene leaves a question mark in the minds of the readers, what does that actually mean. The writer also thinks that there is still a sequel to the story.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis described above, it can be concluded that *Lamb to the Slaughter* is a crime, mystery, and detective short story that reveals some of the characteristics of a femme fatale in the female lead, Mary Maloney. Mary is not portrayed directly as a femme fatale from the start, but there is a transition where she turned into that kind of figure. From an innocent, charming, normal housewife turned into a dangerous and deadly woman in brief. The characteristics that Mary describes as a femme fatale begin with her charming and shapely appearance.

## REFERENCES

- Dahl, Ronald. *Lamb to the Slaughter*. Myweb. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://myweb.scu.edu.tw>
- Elhallaq, A. H. (2015). Representation of Women as Femmes Fatales: History, Development and Analysis. *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, 3(1).
- Haubrich, Wess. (2018, June 5). Medium.com. Retrieved from <https://haubrichnoir.medium.com/on-the-femme-fatale-where-did-she-come->

from-where-is-she-going-1 fe271 defd2d  
Indrasakti, I. H. (2018). Amy Dunne as the Representation of Femme Fatale in Gillian Flynn's Novel *Gone Girl* (Doctoral Dissertation, Diponegoro University).  
Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Femme fatale. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved December 3, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/femme%20fatale>