



## THE USE OF SHORT STORIES AS A BIBLIOTHERAPY MEDIA IN IMPROVING SELF-CONFIDENCE OF CHILD VICTIMS OF BULLYING: A LITERARY PSYCHOLOGY STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the potential of short stories as a medium for bibliotherapy to enhance the self-confidence of children who have experienced bullying, using Lacanian psycho-literary theory. Bullying often causes a fractured self-image, social alienation, and trauma that hinder the formation of a child's identity. Lacan's theory—through the concepts of the *Mirror Stage*, the three psychic registers (*Imaginary*, *Symbolic*, *Real*), and *desire*—provides an analytical framework to understand how readers' interaction with characters and events in short stories can reconstruct a positive self-image. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a literature study technique on four short stories by Clara Ng: *Kapan Hujan Berhenti (When the Rain Stops)*, *Milo Sedang Bosan (Milo is Bored)*, *Melukis Cinta (Painting Love)*, and *Sore Super Sibuk (A Super Busy Afternoon)*. The analysis was conducted through close reading to identify narrative elements that represent the processes of identification (*Imaginary*), internalization of social norms (*Symbolic*), and confrontation with inexpressible experiences (*Real*). The findings show that these four short stories offer therapeutic pathways that enable bullied children to reconstruct their self-image, understand their role within the social order, and direct their desire toward positive goals. This study confirms the role of children's literature as an effective alternative medium for literacy-based psychological interventions.

**Keywords:** short stories, bibliotherapy, bullying, psycho-literary studies, Lacan

### INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a growing social problem in educational settings and negatively impacts children's psychological development. Victims of bullying often experience decreased self-confidence, anxiety, and stress that may persist into adulthood. Therefore, interventions are needed to support their psychological recovery. One method that has been developed in the field of psycho-literary studies is bibliotherapy, a literacy-based therapy that uses books or stories as a medium for emotional and social healing.

Bibliotherapy has proven effective in improving psychological well-being, self-confidence, and social capacity among individuals experiencing emotional difficulties. One promising form of bibliotherapy is the short story, which can provide deep emotional experiences and foster empathetic connections with readers. According to Moulton

(2009), children's stories with bullying themes can be an effective tool in helping them find strategies to face and overcome bullying.

Bullying affects not only children's psychology but also their social aspects. Gregory and Vessey (2004) explain that bibliotherapy can help children rebuild social relationships and improve communication skills after experiencing bullying. By reading stories relevant to their experiences, children can gain new insights into dealing with bullying and find better solutions to build their self-confidence.

Supporting this, Andreou et al. (2013) found that bibliotherapy interventions could change children's attitudes and behavior toward bullying and provide them with more positive strategies in facing difficult situations. Nasution et al. (2023) also demonstrated that mindfulness-based cognitive therapy through bibliotherapy significantly increased self-confidence among victims of cyberbullying.

In Indonesia, the use of short stories in anti-bullying campaigns was examined by Soraya and Badaruddin (2019). Their study showed that short stories as educational media could build students' understanding of the negative impact of bullying and foster empathy. Specially designed short stories with bullying themes can effectively build awareness and social skills among children and adolescents. In addition, Khairunnisa (2020) revealed that child-centered play therapy could improve self-esteem among victims of bullying. This approach aligns with bibliotherapy, which provides space for children to express their emotions through reading and group discussions. Combining bibliotherapy with play therapy can thus yield more optimal results in children's psychological recovery. Similarly, Niman et al. (2019) confirmed that bibliotherapy contributed to improving self-esteem among early adolescents experiencing bullying.

However, most research has focused more on intervention practices rather than structural narrative analysis as the foundation of therapeutic potential. Descriptive research of this kind is still rare. Therefore, this study emerges as a descriptive inquiry into the therapeutic content of children's short stories, using Jacques Lacan's theory as an analytical framework.

According to McSherry (2012), Lacan's theory of the three psychic registers—Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real—can be applied in mental health practice to understand symptoms and processes of the subject in social systems. In literature, the imaginary forms self-image through identification (mirror stage), the symbolic shapes meaning through language and social structures, and the real represents experiences that cannot be fully symbolized, such as trauma or extreme anxiety. With this framework, narratives in children's short stories can function as media for self-reflection, the internalization of positive norms, and the processing of complex emotions.

The four short stories by Clara Ng—*When the Rain Stops*, *Milo is Bored*, *Painting Love*, and *A Super Busy Afternoon*—offer narrative representations filled with values of togetherness, emotional management, inclusive love, and social cooperation. These texts contain interpersonal dynamics reflecting identification, internalization of norms, and emotional processing relevant to child readers, particularly those with bullying-related experiences. By placing these works within Lacanian analysis, this research provides a critical reading that reveals the potential of stories as media for self-reflection and healthier identity formation, while also opening space for further discourse in children's psycho-literary studies.

Thus, this study aims to respond to the need for effective and accessible interventions in addressing the impact of bullying. By exploring the potential of short



stories as bibliotherapeutic media, it is expected to contribute meaningfully to improving the psychological well-being and self-confidence of bullied children in school settings.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research is to identify and describe the therapeutic content of children's short stories by Clara Ng through a psycho-literary analysis based on Jacques Lacan's theory. The research focuses on a close reading of narrative structure, characterization, and symbols associated with the three Lacanian registers: *Imaginary*, *Symbolic*, and *Real*.

The data source consists of four short stories by Clara Ng that fall within the category of children's literature *Kapan Hujan Berhenti*, *Milo sedang Bosan*, *Melukis Cinta*, dan *Sore Super Sibuk*. The selection of these works was based on their thematic relevance to bullying issues and their potential to convey social and emotional values for psychological analysis.

Data were collected through library research, involving intensive and repeated reading of the texts to capture narrative and symbolic elements related to Lacanian concepts. Relevant quotations were recorded to illustrate the processes of self-identification (*Imaginary*), internalization of social norms (*Symbolic*), and emotional experiences that are difficult to symbolize (*Real*). The data analysis followed these steps:

1. Identification of Narrative Elements – locating parts of the stories with therapeutic potential.
2. Classification Based on Lacanian Registers – categorizing findings into *Imaginary*, *Symbolic*, and *Real* in accordance with theory.
3. Contextual Interpretation – interpreting the findings in relation to bullying issues and children's identity formation.
4. Synthesis of Findings – formulating a comprehensive description of how the texts may serve as a medium of self-reflection for child readers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines four short stories by Clara Ng— *Kapan Hujan Berhenti*, *Milo sedang Bosan*, *Melukis Cinta*, dan *Sore Super Sibuk*. The analysis focused on intrinsic elements such as theme, characters and characterization, plot, setting, and moral message. These elements were chosen because they are closely related to the potential therapeutic value for child readers.

### 1. *Kapan Hujan Berhenti*

This short story addresses the theme of sadness and acceptance. The protagonist is depicted as a child experiencing loss and trying to understand the changes around them. The simple plot is framed by a rainy setting that reflects the character's inner grief. The implied moral message is the importance of resilience and the belief that every sorrow eventually comes to an end.

### 2. *Milo Sedang Bosan*

This story explores boredom and the search for meaning in daily life. Milo is introduced as a child filled with boredom, then attempts to overcome it. The linear plot, with its domestic setting, enhances the story's intimacy. The moral lesson emphasizes that togetherness with others can be a solution to alienation.

### 3. Melukis Cinta

The main theme of this story is affection and self-expression through art. The protagonist is portrayed as imaginative and emotionally sensitive. The plot emphasizes the creative process of painting as a way of conveying love. The colorful setting underscores warmth and beauty. The moral message is the importance of expressing love through simple yet meaningful actions.

### 4. Sore Super Sibuk

This story highlights togetherness within a busy family life. The characters are depicted as family members, each preoccupied with their own activities, yet maintaining connection and communication. The straightforward plot emphasizes harmony within daily routines. The home setting during the afternoon portrays the everyday life of children within a family circle. The moral lesson is the importance of cooperation, communication, and mutual understanding in the smallest social unit—the family.

From these four stories, Clara Ng consistently emphasizes emotional themes, social values, and interpersonal relationships. These intrinsic elements open a space for child readers to engage in self-identification, value internalization, and emotional reflection. Viewed through Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly the three registers, the stories reveal deeper therapeutic functions:

- In *Kapan Hujan Berhenti*, the child character's struggle to comprehend grief illustrates the *Imaginary* process, where the subject attempts to build a self-image amidst loss. The continuous rain symbolizes the *Real*—an emotional experience that cannot be fully articulated. For bullied children, this story provides a mirror for their emotions and a healthier way to accept reality.
- *Milo sedang Bosan* demonstrates the dominance of the *Symbolic* register. Milo's boredom is overcome only through entering social structures—interaction with others. Language, norms, and family rules become the means to resolve personal alienation. This teaches children that identity is relational, shaped by others and their social environment.
- In *Melukis Cinta*, artistic activity functions as a medium of sublimation, aligning with Lacan's view that desire fuels creativity even if never fully satisfied. The *Imaginary* emerges as the child projects themselves into the painting, while the *Symbolic* appears through the language of love learned from their surroundings. For child readers, this story models positive identification by channeling emotions through creative expression.
- *Sore Super Sibuk* underscores the *Symbolic* register through family life representation. Individual busyness does not diminish togetherness but instead strengthens social order. The child character and readers alike learn that they have a place within a broader social structure, where rules, communication, and cooperation form the basis of healthy relationships.



Overall, the Lacanian reading of these stories shows that children's literature can serve as a therapeutic medium. The *Imaginary* helps children in self-identification, the *Symbolic* provides a framework of norms and meaning, and the *Real* presents emotional experiences that connect readers with trauma or unspoken hopes. Clara Ng's works thus not only convey moral values but also offer children opportunities for self-reflection and the construction of a more resilient identity.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Clara Ng's children's short stories hold significant therapeutic potential when read through a Lacanian psycho-literary perspective. The analysis of Kapan Hujan Berhenti, Milo sedang Bosan, Melukis Cinta, dan Sore Super Sibuk reveals that these texts are rich in emotional, social, and moral values that may help bullied children rebuild their self-image and process their psychological experiences.

Within Lacan's framework, the *Imaginary* appears through character identification and self-image formation; the *Symbolic* is visible in the internalization of language, norms, and social structures; and the *Real* is expressed in emotional experiences that cannot be fully conveyed in language, including trauma and loss. By combining these three registers, literature provides children with a reflective space to understand themselves, foster empathy, and strengthen social identity.

As a descriptive study, this research has not yet reached the stage of implementing bibliotherapy in schools. However, the findings emphasize the importance of analyzing children's literature as a conceptual foundation for psychological interventions. These results may serve as a stepping stone for further studies, whether in developing bibliotherapy models based on short stories or applying them practically in educational and counseling contexts.

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