

SISTERHOOD IN ANN M. MARTIN'S *BELLE TEAL*

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Abstract. A relationship called sisterhood has become an ordinary thing in society. The sisterhood does not only happen to fellow women without blood ties but also occurs between relationships across generations of which parents and children live. To examine the occurrence of sisterhood relationships by parents and children, the writer decided to do a study on a novel entitled *Belle Teal* by Ann M. Martin. Using the qualitative method, the data are analyzed descriptively. By applying feminist literary criticism the writer discusses several problem statements which include the sisterhood that occurs across generations and how sisterhood can be exposed to cross-generational relationships. From the analysis, it can be concluded that sisterhood can occur across-generation. Mutual caring, intimacy, and shared activity can enhance and expose the sisterhood relationship among the perpetrators. Sisterhood also has a positive impact that can make a person have better thought than before.

Key Words: *feminist literary criticism, sisterhood, mutual caring, intimacy, shared activity.*

INTRODUCTION

As humans who were born with the hierarchy of needs, they need a relationship that can motivate and change all the bad characters in life. One of the relationships is friendship. Friendship is an important element of human life. Helen Keller said, "I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light (Helen Keller, 1920)". A friendship can be build when a human has similarities in mission, vision, motivation, and a strong sense of mutual need. Friendship is not only formed between two-person children but a friendship can also be established between the relationship of parents and children, especially between mother and

daughter or grandmother and granddaughter.

A friendship that exists within a group of women who have the same problems, oppression, and not judges others called sisterhood. In this connection, a strong relationship between women can solve all problems that can't be resolved by any part except the part is also a woman. Sisterhood has occurred when the relationship is mutually reinforcing and understanding each other. According to Bell Hooks, "when fellow women build a bond based on shared strengths and resources, it's the type of bonding the essence of Sisterhood (Hooks, 1984: 46)".

In life, a sisterhood can be seen from several characteristics that are usually called the nature of sisterhood. The nature of sisterhood is a way of how sisterhood can be known through three reasons: mutual caring, intimacy, and shared activity.

Based on the above background, this paper discusses the characteristics of sisterhood in *Belle Teal* by Ann M. Martin. Many feminist aspects can be seen from this novel, especially how sisterhood exposed in this fiction. Bell Hooks (1984: 44) states that sisterhood as slogan, motto, rallying cry no longer evokes the spirit of power in unity. Unity is done by a group of women is what causes a relationship so they can strengthen each other. Sisterhood has the essence if a woman will not be able to solve her problems without the help of another woman. The nature of sisterhood can be seen from three relationships: Mutual Caring, Intimacy, and Shared Activity.

a. Mutual Caring

Mutual caring is the first way to know that a person has a bond or a sisterhood relationship with another person. Mutual caring here means when someone cares about someone else more than she cares about herself. When a mutual caring occurs, indirectly a sisterhood will be built based on mutual caring that already exists. Mutual caring that occurs between two women or more is what will change a person's attitude from ignorance and just become more sensitive and sensitive to her fellow women.

b. Intimacy

Besides mutual caring, sisterhood can also be established with intimacy. A sisterhood can also be built with a high degree of intimacy. Intimacy is frequent contact between the perpetrators of this sisterhood. Like for example, intensity meets intensity to chat together. This is because women have more comfort. Ann M. Martin's novel *Belle Teal* is chosen because it has many elements of feminism in which women are more flexible in making decisions and have more room for mutual support for their fellow women. This novel also shows how strong the sisterhood between mother and daughter although the mother only has little time to meet. This novel tells the story of Belle Teal Harper who lives only with her mother and grandmother. As a fifth grade student, she already experiences some conflicts in her life. One of them is with 3 black children who come value against the people who are common to her to meet. She will also be more open to other women she knows well.

c. Shared Activity

A final common thread in philosophical accounts of sisterhood is shared activity. The background intuition is this: never to share the activity with someone and in this way to interact with her is not to have the kind of relationship with her that could be called sisterhood, even if you each care for the other for her sake. to school. Many people are hostile to the three black children, but not with Belle Teal and Clarice. Clarice is an old friend and a classmate of Belle Teal. She always

understands and helps Belle Teal to face her problems with her friends. Belle Teal's mother, Adelle, is also very caring and helps Belle Teal to solve her problems. Adelle always has time to listen to stories and problems faced by Belle Teal. She advises on what Belle Teal to do when facing some problems. Belle Teal has a lot of people who love her at home. Her grandmother, Belle Teal Rhodes, is a senile person. She and her grandmother always work together without judging each other. The relationship between Belle Teal, Adelle, and her grandmother more than the relationship between a mother and a child. They not only understand each other in family relations but they are also close like friends. Clarice has also become a friend who strengthens Belle Teal.

METHOD

This study applies a descriptive qualitative method. The data were taken mainly from the novel *Belle Teal* written by Ann M. Martin in 2001. This study aims to see how sisterhood explained by the author through characters and setting from the novel. By applying close reading, the data were selected, classified, and interpreted. The feminist approach is used to explain about the analysis of this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sisterhood in this novel is described as a relationship based on trust, confidence, and mutual reinforcement. The presence of the figure like Gran and Mama indicates that a problem experienced by Belle Teal can only be solved by fellow women who have more

experience in life. Even there is a figure of other women, Clarice, in this relationship. Clarice is described as a woman who is not as wise as Gran and Mama in solving the problem. The sisterhood that appears in this novel shows that there is no gap in the relationship although the characters have a considerable age difference. Precisely with the difference, they can complete their shortcomings like Gran who can replace a figure of Mama for Belle Teal and Belle Teal who can remind Gran when her senile began to recur.

The finding shows that sisterhood can be characterized by the existence of mutual caring, intimacy, and a shared activity performed by these three main characters.

A. The Sisterhood between Belle Teal and Gran

Belle Teal is a 5th grader who has a grandmother who begins senile because of her old age. Her senility often makes a mistake when she calls Belle Teal's name. She often calls her Lyman. Lyman is Adelle's brother. Belle Teal and grandmother have the same name. The name of her grandmother is Belle Teal Rhodes while the name of Belle Teal is Belle Teal Harper. Having the same name as her grandmother makes her proud. It is shown in the following statement, "I feel that little prick of pride I feel every time I am reminded that I was named for my gran. She is Belle Teal Rhodes, and I am Belle Teal Harper. (Ann M. Martin, 2001: 13)".

Even though her grandmother is getting old, Belle Teal still praised her ability to overcome all of the problems. Gran

also can assess a person's condition under any circumstances. Although Belle Teal knows that her grandmother has flaws, she still praises the grandeur of her grandmother. It can be seen from the following quotation, "Gran, she is amazing, even if she has become a little forgetful. She can figure out how to do just about anything. And she can always see the good in people and situations... (Ann M. Martin, 2001: 1)".

Sometimes, grandmother's mistakes make Belle Teal angry, but because she understands her grandmother, she also forgives the mistakes made by her.

The mutual caring between happens because they always spend their time together. Even with all Gran's shortcomings, it does not depress the sense of caring from both sides. The day before Belle Teal attend school after a long holiday, Gran told her that she should spend the rest of her vacation by enjoying her holiday and not concern herself with housework. Implicitly, Gran suggests Belle Teal go outside and play with her friends before school begins. Gran wants Belle Teal to have a great last holiday. Gran's attention to Belle Teal is also seen as Belle Teal go to school. Every day, Gran knows that Belle Teal's pocket money is just enough to buy milk in the school cafeteria. Since Gran does not want Belle Teal starving during school, she always cooks delicious meals every day "she has packed me up a tasty lunch. (Ann M. Martin, 2001:50)".

Since Mama decides to go back to school, Belle Teal become Gran's responsibility at home. Mama does not

have much time to keep Belle Teal instead" Gran, she has always taken care of me. (Ann M. Martin, 2001: 65)". It can be interpreted that even though Gran is senile, she is still able to keep her granddaughter. She is also able to ensure that her granddaughter is safe while she is with her. Though Belle Teal also knows that her mama wants her help and keep Gran, not the vise versa.

B. The Sisterhood between Belle Teal and Gran

Mama is the only parent that Belle Teal has because Belle Teal's father died when Belle Teal was just born. Since mama becomes a single parent, she has to spend most of her time working in order to support their lives, The lives of Belle Teal and grandmother financially. Belle Teal tells that "Mama also usually works two to three jobs all at once, depending on the time of year. Waitressing, bartending, whatever she can find. (Ann M. Martin, 2001: 3)". From the quotation, we know that a mama is a person who is willing to sacrifice and do anything for the happiness of the woman she loves. Mom does any work as long as she can work well.

Mama is always busy daily. When Belle Teal looks at her mother in her work uniform, she feels unhappy. However, Mama's work uniform makes her mama look beautiful, which makes Belle Teal praise her mama. Belle Teal seldom has dinner with her Mama at home.

Nevertheless, Mama's business does not reduce the awareness that occurs between them. It is shown the day before Belle Teal begins its first day at school.

Mama makes sure that Belle Teal's needs are fulfilled. "Now, what is that for, Belle Teal?" she asks me with a little smile. "Nothing," I say, with a smile back. Mama looks up and smiles at both of us. Then she says to me, "All ready for school?" "Yes, ma'am". "You got enough pencils and things?" (Ann M. Martin, 2001: 16)". The following statement shows how much Mama cares about Belle Teal. Although she cannot fully control Belle Teal at home every day, Mama still takes the time to check out the needs of school supplies.

On one occasion, Mama expresses her desire to return to school. Initially, Belle Teal disagrees because she feels that her mother is able to compensate for all her decisions, she also approves Mama's decision to go to school. Now, every day, Mama and Belle Teal will remind each other to do their homework," You do your homework, Mama?" I ask. "Yeah, precious. You?" "All done." I like that Mama and I both have homework to do. (Ann M. Martin, 2001: 77)". This shows the readers how Belle Teal loves her Mama. She has a dream that her Mama has a better job. She dreams to have a long dinner and chit chat with her because her mother always seems to be in a hurry.

At Christmas Eve, Belle Teal plays the drama at school. She has a role as Mary, Jesus's mother. Belle Teal has been very happy since the announcement of her role as Mary. Her excitement grows

"..., especially when I spot Mama and Gran, Mama holds a bag up high to let me know she has the fruitcakes. I smile. I'm so happy Mama is

here. She told Mr. Titus she just had to have another day off, that she wouldn't miss this for the world. (Ann M. Martin, 2001:201)".

From the above statement, readers can see that Belle Teal and Mama support each other. Even Mama is willing to sacrifice her working hours just to come to Belle Teal drama.

C. The Sisterhood between Belle Teal and Clarice

At school, Belle Teal has a friend who cares about her. Her name is Clarice. Belle Teal and Clarice are friends since they were in kindergarten "Clarice and Me, we have been best friends since the beginning of kindergarten, which was way back in 1957. (Ann M. Martin, 2001: 5)".

They have known for a long time, mutual caring that exists between them is very strong. It happens during their first few days at school. Belle Teal's school accepts black students. But some white parents protest against the school policy. They disagree if white and black students are mixed in one classroom. They demand the school review its policy.

"When the last bell of the day rings, my heart gives a jump. I don't want to go outside where those parents are circling around. Clarice, she must be feeling nervous too, because she loops her arm through mine and we walk out of our classroom

side by side. (Ann M. Martin, 2001: 53)".

From this quotation, we can see that Belle Teal and Clarice are protecting each other from the tantrums of unwilling parents when their children have to go to school with black people. Belle Teal and Clarice go hand in hand, tying each other's hands together to make sure that each of them is all right. To dispel their fears, they run like they are between the graveyards on Route 518.

CONCLUSION

From what has been discussed above, a conclusion can be drawn. The study shows that a relationship called sisterhood may occur in some women across generations. Despite the many shortcomings and differences, the relationship between women like Belle Teal, Gran, Mama, and Clarice, can go strong if cause the support of each other. All of them are able to maintain their relationship well and disregard the flaws in each of them.

Both Gran who is senile and old and mama is always busy to work do not make Belle Teal feel lazy to get in touch with them. She understands and is proud of them. She always praised her smart grandmother in cooking and baking. She also praises the toughness of Mama to be able to support her small family by working 2 shifts for a day. Belle Teal also thanks to Clarice for their friendship.

The sisterhood that built by these four figures in this novel is based on mutual caring, intimacy, and shared activity. It can be concluded that the

relationship across generations has a good effect if they understand their shortcomings and differences.

Belle Teal, a 5th-grade student can understand the circumstances that are difficult to understand by children her age. She learns some great things that are sometimes impossible for adults to do. She is able to respect the differences because of the teachings of Mama and Gran. Even she is able to protect her best friend when she is bullied by friends at school. At a very young age, she is able to see why women need sisterhood.

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