

**Aquarini Priyatna Prabasmoro**  
**Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research**  
**School of Politics and Social Inquiry**  
**Monash University**  
**Australia**  
**atwinatwin@gmail.com**

## **Fragments and Coherence in Indonesian Female Celebrity Auto/Biographical Practices in Women's Magazines"**

This paper discusses the notion of femininity values assigned to women and considered to be the sign of womanhood (Moi, 1991) and the representation of femininity by female celebrities as staged in their auto/biographical practice in women's magazines. The paper also analyses how celebrity auto/biographical practices constitute what can be considered as feminine narrative [structure]. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of the notions of space and time (chronotope) as coined by Bakhtin (1981) in understanding the gendering and gendered construction of femininity and the feminine narrative in female celebrities' representation in the selected corpus.

The celebrity auto/biographies under discussion display complex narrative structures, where co-writers and the voices of family and friends become part of the authorial voice. They take celebrity and fame as key life achievements and draw in popular cultural media forms such as magazine articles, photographic shoots and news reports to create auto/biographies that simultaneously report celebrity lives and secure celebrity status. These auto/biographies offer challenges to conventional/orthodox narrative authority in conventional autobiography and reposition the ephemera of celebrity as a form of autobiographical practice. Further, by examining how these celebrity auto/biographies utilise different points of view, fragmented narrative structures, the integration of the everyday, and the inclusion of fashion photography I argue that these works extend the meanings conventionally attached to this category of life writing. The more flexible and fragmented structure of these book-length celebrity auto/biographies and alternate auto/biographical practices appearing in women's magazines suggest that more embracing critical accounts of contemporary auto/biographies are necessary.

**Key words: auto/biographical practices, celebrities, femininities**

### **Introduction**

This paper analyses two different forms of self narrative in magazines, which I argue are a popular form of auto/biographical practice. The magazines I have selected are arguably the long standing Indonesian women's magazines, namely *Kartini* and *Femina*. *Kartini* is among the first Indonesian women's magazine whose scope cover the upper middle class women as well as housewives (Kartajaya, Yuswohady, Christynar, & Darwin, 2005: 133). It covers various, even stereotypical "women's issues" from health, to cooking, from beauty and children and fashion. *Kartini* used to be

a very powerful magazine until recently, especially since the booming of media and other forms of women's media, including the cheaper tabloids in 1999 (Kartajaya et al., 2005). Now, *Kartini* is arguably no longer the most powerful magazine, although it is still surviving. The new market leader, if not the most powerful one, is now *Femina*, which according to Rhenald Kasali (1998: 153), is the best magazine in its class, not only through its advertising turnover, which amounted to 19 billion in the first semester of 1997, but also through its high circulation. Unlike *Kartini*, *Femina* readers are more likely to be young professionals, independent, even when they are also housewives (Kasali, 1998). The different target readers implicate different issues, concerns and interests dwelled upon in the content as well as different ways of communicating them.

Both magazines are interested in telling "stories" of celebrities in many different ways. Basically, in terms of length, there are two forms of auto/biographical practice in women's magazines: namely the short one and the serial. The short one is often referred to as "Cover Story", namely the story about the woman/women featured in the magazine cover. *Kartini* names this feature "Cover Story", while *Femina* calls it *Cerita Sampul*, which literally means cover story. This feature generally takes up only one to three pages and only talks about a certain moment of the celebrity's life, mostly around the time the photo shot is taken for the cover. The plot of this narrative is highly dependant on issues of relationship in the way that it can even be read as a romantic story. Consequently, this space for talking about relationship can also be argued to be feminine in its nature (Jelinek, 1998). This tendency for female celebrity auto/biography to be "feminine" in its inclination for discussing private and domestic relationship has been analysed in the previous chapter on the book-length celebrity auto/biographies. Other feminine issues do appear as well in these auto/biographical features, namely beauty, and body. Although discussion about career does emerge, it is mostly connected to how it affects the relationships with their close circle, particularly their romantic partner. The short auto/biographical practice in *Femina* often appears under different "features" despite the lack of any distinctive differences among them. The frequent names for the similar feature are *Cerita Sampul* (Cover Story), *Omong-omong* (Chit chat), *Selebriti* (Celebrity), and *Halo* (Hallo). Based on its stability, I choose to discuss *Kartini*'s "Cover Story". As a feature, the *Cover Story* in *Kartini* has a fixed name and pattern of narration, compared to the same auto/biographical feature in *Femina*. *Cover story* as a feature appears in *Kartini* in all the years covered in this research, namely 2000 – 2006.

In choosing the texts to be analysed in this paper, I focus on the celebrities who appeared and reappeared in *Cover Story* at least three times within the period of 2000-2006. This is to establish a sense of continuity of the narrative of the selves within the different moments of their lives. There are two celebrities that appeared in four issues, four others appeared in three issues. However, to ensure the focus, I limit the corpus to four celebrities and I decided to take only two celebrities who appeared in three issues based on the longer time span of the three appearances, namely Mariana Renata (February, 2000 – September, 2005) and Alya Rohali (November, 2000 – June, 2006). I propose that the longer time covered, the fuller the segments and moments of the life can be revealed. I also argue that a longer time span means a more sense of continuity, despite the time discrepancy and disruptions. In other words, the texts provide what Pearce (1994: 193) argues as "fragmented temporal continuum".

The other type that can be mentioned here is the serial auto/biographical feature published by *Femina* under the name of *Serial*. This is a continuous narrative about a celebrity, consisting of two to five parts. The narrative of the selves covered by this feature is similar to “continuing story”. While it does still represent only segments of the celebrity’s life, the segments constitute a more complete continuum with moments and segments more smoothly introduced. *Serial* also employs repetitive strategy that moves the character from one chronotope to another, traversing the time from the past to the historical/biological and biographical “present” and back. The same also applies to the space where the celebrity biographical subject moves from public space to domestic space rendering the distortion of the two domains. As Bakhtin (1981: 132) asserts:

It is fully understandable that in such a “biographized” individual (in such an image of a man) (sic) there was not, nor could there be, anything intimate or private, secret or personal, anything relating solely to the individual himself, anything that was, in principle, solitary. Here the individual is open on all sides, he is all surface, there in him nothing that exists “for his sake alone,” nothing that could not be subject to public or state control and evaluation. Everything here, down to the last detail, is entirely public.

This is even more so in the contemporary celebrity culture. Stories about celebrities are everyday information shared by a large audience worldwide. The story about a celebrity’s break up, marriage, divorce is a story that has proven to be of great interest to both the enthusiasts and the apathies. Once a person’s life is written, even in its specific temporal fragment, her life is public and the space where private/public as well as feminine/masculine domains reside are effectively traversed. Interestingly, although celebrity’s life is often narrated and represented by fragmented segments, the main plot of *Serial* is seemingly linear, telling the story chronologically in terms of the historical/biological life of the celebrity. However, the introduction to the feature is almost always a flashback. It starts from a certain moment in the celebrity’s life that is considered the trajectory of her success and achievement, or extraordinariness. There are also interceptions to the plot by bringing the present biographical subject to asserts about a certain moment in her past life. In this way the past selves are brought to the present or the present selves bridges the past selves to the present. Thus the biographical subject is transported from her fame and celebrity status to her pre-fame space, then moves forward again in a mode of retracing her way to the top in terms of her career, and finding and being united with the man that she loves. This is what Bakhtin (1981) argues as the two biological moments where there is an empty space, in which the auto/biographical subject remains the same; she is as beautiful as the day she was born despite the many adventures, obstacles, and battles she has had to endure.

### **Cover Story : Chronotopic Representations of Feminine Selves**

*Cover Story* is comprised of three basic parts, namely the title, the introduction and the body. **The title** usually consists of two parts, namely the name of the celebrity and a short line of direct quotation from the interview or a “summary” of the viewpoint of the celebrity. The title may or may not reflect the whole text as the title also functions to attract the readers. The second part is the introduction. **The introduction** functions as an abstract of the text. It also reminds the readers about the celebrity featured by stating her status in terms of her achievement, or simply her achievement, her past or present relationships, as well as her point of view on certain issues, mostly pertaining to

their personal opinion and preferences. The third part is **the body**. In this part celebrity's life is told in third person narrative. The striking feature of celebrity profile in *Cover Story* is the extensive use of flashback to situate the celebrity featured into the present situation.

In the case of auto/biographical practice in women's magazines, flashback is used to position the celebrity featured within the space and time in the past and connect it to the space and time of the present in such a way that a distance is exposed but at the same time it shows the distance covered; the journey from her pre-celebrity selves to the celebrity selves. The flashback typically consists of these two types of memory, the private and the public. The private indicates the personal memory of the celebrity about her "past" time and her past space denoting her pre-celebrity selves. On the contrary, public memory work is mostly carried out by the narrator who deliberately states the time and space connecting them with event[s] that became the trajectory of the celebrity status of the celebrity featured. The memory presented is not only that of the personal time and space, for example what the celebrity remembers as her past but also it includes the memory built in public space and time, for example in relation to the occurrence of [an] event[s]. In this way the personal time and space meet public time and space. As Cosslett et.al. (Cosslett, Lury, & Summerfield, 2000: 5) argue, "Memory, too, then is intersubjective and dialogical, a function of personal identifications and social commitments. While it may be uniquely ours it is also objectified, a matter of public convention and shared rituals." Thus, the narrator's narrative constitutes a public memory work that refers to public space and time. Wise calls this space "historical space and time", history being interpreted as public memory of a public[ized] occurrence.

In *Cover Story*, where flashback is used, the narrator starts the story by moving the time space to the past, giving the account about the beginning of the featured celebrity's career – in two of the four celebrities this part emphasizes on the unplanned, accidental and surprising (unexpected) nature of the beginning or progress of the career. This account is stated both through direct quotations as well as the narrator's narration. Putri Patricia's statement is exemplary of the direct statement about accidental nature of the beginning of celebrity's career. She is quoted, "I was just passing the time. When I was in secondary school, I liked being photographed" (Drianurmini, 2001: 16). The accidental and unexpected nature is also referred to by statements inferring that she "did not mean to do it" or "did not actually want to do it" or that she was surprised to know that she got the job, as displayed in Mariana Renata's two texts (Simarmata, 2004: 20; Sukmaraja, 2000: 11). The same message of accidental beginning, as well as good luck are stated in the text, as in the account of Putri Patricia's career (Widuhung, 2005) and also that of Mariana Renata, who is said to have been tapped by "the goddess of fortune" (Sukmaraja, 2000: 11).

The reference to accidental luck is symptomatic of celebrity culture that renders celebrities as ordinary and extraordinary (Dyer, 2001; Redmond, 2006). But as also seen in the further depiction of the celebrities concerned, luck itself is not enough. They have to prove their "worthiness" of their luck through "hard work and professionalism" as Dyer (2001: 42) asserts:

Particularly as developed in the star system, the success myth tries to orchestrate several contradictory elements: that ordinariness is the hallmark of the star; that the system rewards

talent and ‘specialness’; that luck, ‘breaks’, which may happen to anyone typify the career of the star; and that hard work and professionalism are necessary for stardom.

This narrative of luck is designated within the space of pre-celebrity and past time. The present celebrity status renders the celebrity a new space for recognition in the present and the future time. This crisscross between the pre-celebrity to celebrity status, from the present and future also highlight the blurring hegemonic space of ordinary and extraordinary. For one ordinary individual to be extraordinary, one needs not only luck but also some extraordinariness and to remain extraordinary, once one has become so, one has to remain ordinary. Extraordinariness in celebrity can manifest in different forms. In Alya Rohali, for example, it is in her being selective in choosing her career path “unlike other actresses”, in her pursue of postgraduate study, in her breastfeeding her baby, and her ideal marriage to her husband (then) (Drianurmini, 2000). In Feby Febiola, her distinction from the rest (the other ordinaries and other celebrities) is her “professionalism”, which includes playing the typical and becoming boring role in a television cinema, her expansion of career path to singing in addition to modelling, which has been her profession earlier (M.R., 2000). As the story moves its chronotope to the present these ideals remain the same regardless the fact that between the year of 2000 to 2006, for example, in her real-life Alya Rohali has experienced different obstacles and changes, including divorce, which changed her status from a married woman to a single mother. These, particularly painful transformation is not visible either in the picture or in narration. Her pictures of 2000 and 2006 are equally radiant and optimistic. She does not seem to age despite the 6 year gap of her first feature in the magazine. Her ideals and view towards her partner remain the same and her feeling for her partner, who is not the same one she had in 2000, is as adoring as it was for her previous partner. The issue in 2003 acts as a gap between the two spaces of her romantic relationships, yet this issue only produces segments of life, selected moments when the pain has been subsided and other negative feelings have been overcome.

It can be argued that Alya’s femininity is depicted as a range of different traits and characteristics. On one hand, she is described as strong and rational, exemplified by her inability to cope with the divorce and child-rearing. She is capable and intelligent, exemplified by her postgraduate education done while still working full time as an entertainer. On the other hand, in Alya Rohali’s narrative as well as in all three other celebrities, they are shown to have the normative embodiment of ideal femininity: beautiful, and remains beautiful over the years and in the case of Alya Rohali, she has a body that remains slim even after childbirth. The reference to beauty is actually a prototypical characteristic of celebrity auto/biographical practice in women’s magazines. All women are referred to as being “beautiful” in some parts of their portrayals, particularly in the introduction or in the first paragraphs. The typical narrative about beauty in *Cover Story* is by referring to the celebrity as “the beautiful woman”, such as in the following example in the text on Mariana Renata, “Finally, after a few meetings and interviews, the beautiful girl who was born on 31 December 1983 officially became the model of LUX” (Simarmata, 2004). The consistent denotation of “beautiful girl/woman” suggests that being beautiful is the primary reference of their embodiment of their celebrity status.

The reference to doing a University degree as an important thing in the construction of femininity as intelligence is also found in Mariana Renata’s narrative (Simarmata, 2004). Intelligence does not merely refer to the academic capacity but more importantly to the ability for multitasking, to be different selves, taking different spaces at the same time. Thus again, time is condensed while the

space is extended. The ability to negotiate such chrontope can be considered not only as the representation of idealized feminine selves but also the extraordinary characteristic of their celebrity selves.

As I have hinted, the normative portrayal is also emphasized by the constant reference to happy relationships with husband, ex husband, and future husband, as particularly apparent in Alya Rohali's narrative ("Alya Rohali tentang Calon Suami Kedua Faiz Ramzy R: Meski Bujangan Dia lebih Matang," 2006; Drianurmini, 2000; Paramita, 2003). More or less the same can be said about another married celebrity, Feby Febiola, who was with another man at the first *Cover Story* but later married another man (Anton, 2004; M.R., 2000; Rinawati, 2006; Sukmaraja, 2002). In Feby Febiola's narrative, married-life is described as happy. The couple is described as harmonious and understanding towards each other in the way that their marriage is idealized and romanticised. The private space of marriage is put as a public display, as a performance, yet it constructs her not entirely as a public person, rather as a private person deliberately put in public stage. Her private life becomes the "public square" in which the supposedly personal deliberations about relationship are delivered. Feby Febiola the public self and Feby Febiola the personal self thus substitute each other the ways in which it renders the competing idealized images of her [private] femininity self and [public] celebrity self which she has supposedly succeeded to be displayed.

In all selected texts of *Cover Story*, femininity is shown to be a range of domains that women can move from one to another (Ussher, 1997). Women can perform being "Girl", by submitting to the normative femininity and heterosexuality, but at the same time they can also resist the notion of femininity as being the weaker sex by showing their capability for independence from their liaison with men. On the other time or even at the same time, they can also perform the expected role of being a woman in their relationship by constantly referring to their [future] partners or their need for them. The *Cover Story* texts also construct heterosexual relationships as a primary element of femininity by persistently discussing the issue, even by pointing the absence of partner and what is expected from her [future] man, as in the case of Mariana Renata (Ikrima, 2005; Simarmata, 2004) and Putri Patricia (Drianurmini, 2001), or by referring to the insistence of keeping her private life private as in the case of Putri Patricia (Sukamaraja & Melly, 2003) and Feby Febiola (M.R., 2000). The irony of such depiction is that the story about the absence of men is used to substitute the story about the man they are supposedly in relationship with. Likewise, the insistence of "keeping things private" while at the same time telling the story that the particular celebrity is in a relationship with a particular person shows that celebrity femininity in women's magazines is highly constructed on heterosexuality the ways in which even its absence marks its overarching presence.

This particular mention of overcoming crisis and difficulties and the re-emergence as both a new and the same idealized feminine Selves through changes can be found in all narratives of celebrities analysed in this section. In particular is that of Alya Rohali's as I have discussed. Another example is the narrative of Feby Febiola. Her narrative includes a flashback about her past pre-celebrity status (9 years of biographical age), where she started as a mere teenage model to becoming an established actress. Her present biographical selves is portrayed as a very humble person, as other non-celebrities are supposed to be. This is contrasted to her supposedly established status as an actor as highlighted in the title of this particular text, "The more [I am] in the acting world, my feeling is getting more sharpened" (Rinawati, 2006: 10). This title suggests Feby Febiola's established status

as an actor but at the same time her biographical selves explicitly articulate that her acting career is a mere “ordinary experience” because she is “used to acting”. These opposing stands again insinuate the traverse of the two celebrity domains of ordinary and extraordinary. Acting is described as work (that needs to be sharpened) but at the same time, it is also represented as her natural talent (that she can do without having to exert much effort). I argue that in this portrayal, Feby Febiola is pictured and constructed as an ordinary person who happens to have extra - ordinary quality or an extraordinary person who happens to be ordinary. In short, she is represented as an ordinary extraordinary person, or an extraordinary ordinary person. These differentiation is important because a celebrity is supposedly an ordinary person, yet she/he has an extraordinary talent that eventually makes her/him extraordinary (Marshall, 2001). On the other hand, there is also the assumption that basically, a celebrity is born extraordinary, as the narrative of accidental beginning of various celebrities have shown (McCracken, 1993). Their extraordinariness is just something waiting to emerge from their ordinariness.

The traverse of chronotopes is more obvious in the photographic narrative. All four celebrities do not age in all their photographs throughout the years covered. Despite the elapse of five to six years, the four celebrities remain as youthful as their first appearance in the cover story. Even more interesting, for example, due to the different trends of what are fashionable regarding the dress, make up, hairstyle, choreograph, etc. within certain spaces and times, I argue that in their photographs, Putri Patricia and Alya Rohali somehow even age in reverse. That is, they look older in photographs of their first appearance than in their later appearance. This also shows how the “story” of celebrities in magazine falls into the category of romantic chronotope as Pearce (1998) coins. In looking at the pictures and following Pearce’s argument, I maintain that the life of the celebrity. Having looked into parts of the narrative of “fragmented temporal continuum” (Pearce, 1994: 193) in *Cover Story*, I also argue that the auto/biography of celebrities is almost always the representation of the idealized feminine selves capable of transcending time, challenges and crises, the selves who is continuously and simultaneously the same and the new person, and whose struggle and efforts for success and survival leave no trace of time elapsed or excess of distress. The selective and carefully chosen moments of their lives considered fit to represent their selves constitute the representation of their ideal[ized] Selves. As Bakhtin (1981: 131) argues, “Real biographical time is here almost entirely dissolved in the ideal (and even abstract) time of metamorphosis”. In other words, the “real and truthful” selves is not to be found in auto/biographies.

The other memory work used in flashback is through reciting public or historical events in which the celebrity has made her trajectory or breakthrough to success. In the *Cover Story* featuring Alya Rohali, (Drianurmini, 2000) for example, the narrator starts the story by reminding the readers about the Putri Indonesia pageant<sup>1</sup> that Alya won in 1996. The narrator then continues by mentioning programs and films that Alya Rohali has starred. As public events, the programs and films become the representation of Alya Rohali as a public self in public time and space. Interestingly this

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<sup>1</sup> There are two competing beauty pageants in Indonesia sponsored by two competing traditional cosmetic companies, one is *Putri Indonesia* (literally means Miss Indonesia), which is sponsored by Mustika Ratu, the other one is Miss Indonesia, which is sponsored by Sari Ayu. While *Putri Indonesia* is globally linked to Miss Universe Pageant – thus also referred to as Miss Indonesia Universe, Miss Indonesia is linked to Miss World – thus also referred to as Miss Indonesia World. (“Putri Indonesia,”).

representation of public self is then juxtaposed with her own narrative telling about her private self at that time that she began her career, particularly her difficulty in juggling with her public and private commitments, “[A]t that time, my whole time was spent on shooting, taking care of the family and exams” (Drianurmini, 2000: 22). This utterance shows how time and space produce a complicated web of the construction of her feminine selves. Not only Alya Rohali is fragmented between the past and the present selves, she is also fragmented in her position in private and public spaces: Alya Rohali the celebrity, the mother/wife and the student. The construction of selves is thus fragmented among the different spaces whose boundary of public and private is blurred. Her celebrity status renders her personal space to be put in public, making her performance as a feminine selves put doubly in display, as we can see, for example in the photograph of her holding her daughter. In this picture she is dressed very casually, denoting the position of that moment as private, yet this private space is displayed in public space, making it public.

The representation of the selves as a public memory is also shown in Feby Febiola’s *Cover Story*, where her celebrity status is closely associated with a highly successful movie in 1980s, *Catatan Si Boy*. This trajectory of career is mentioned in the *Cover Story* of two issues (Anton, 2004; Sukmaraja, 2002), denoting the importance of the public success of *Catatan Si Boy* to the individual career of Feby Febiola. Interestingly, the first paragraphs of the bodies of the feature are identical in representing Feby Febiola as both a private and public selves. The paragraphs both represent Feby Febiola as a pretty actress, mentioning further her origin, “born in Jakarta” her age by either mentioning the exact date of birth, including the year or by stating her age, “born 24 years ago” (in 2002). The description then goes on to her role in *Catatan Si Boy*, yet emphasizing it that she only became famous after her role in television series *Tersayang*. This public memory work presents a very interesting construction of her feminine selves through the chronotopes of the narratives. I argue that the association is established to ignite the public memory of her role in the film. Thus the construction of her celebrity status is not only dependant on what she does, but also on historical events in which she participated. The readers are invited to associate the public event to the more private occurrence in the life of Feby Febiola. Again, the construction of female celebrity private space is in dialogue with, if not substituted by, the public space. After associating her past with a “historical” event, the narrative moves again to private space as it tells about her parents, highlighting her mixed-race origin (she has Dutch origin). However, even this personal embodiment is inevitably public for first it is publicised, deliberated in a public space, and it cannot be dissociated from Indonesian context: culture and history. Being mixed-race (of white descent) is an advantage in Indonesian culture, particularly in popular and women’s culture. Out of the four celebrities discussed here, two are mixed-raced, namely Feby Febiola and Mariana Renata (of French, Japanese and Italian descent). In fact, mixed-raced celebrities are a prevalent phenomenon in Asian popular culture, especially in Indonesia as I have argued elsewhere (Prabasmoro, 2004, 2006). Further than that, as whiteness is signified as beautiful and attractive, it further renders more emergence of mixed-raced celebrities making it more and more of idealized beauty (Prabasmoro, 2004). This deliberation reveals that the construct of Indonesian women’s beauty and desirability is not exclusive within the local space and/or contemporary time, rather it is deeply rooted in the issue of race, ethnic, as well global construct of white femininity that in the case of Indonesia can be traced long back to the past during or as the effect of the Dutch colonialization (Prabasmoro, 2004).



## Conclusion

Having looked into the temporal auto/biographies of female celebrities in magazine, I propose that the “new forms” of auto/biography within celebrity and women’s culture within the selected magazine can be considered to be a “stylish” adaptation of the classical forms to the new space and time available within the context. The newness of these forms of celebrity auto/biographical practice is not much in its content, rather in its expression. Female celebrities are constantly linked to their personal domains regardless their contribution in public space. Thus, while these auto/biographical practice can be said to have attempted different representations of femininity (or femininities) through traversing times and spaces, it highlights again and again the hegemonic construct of masculine and feminine space and time. This again indicates that in auto/biographical practice in women’s magazines, female celebrities move continuously between the private space and the public space. Time in such auto/biographical practice is “thickened”, the past selves are compressed as historical moments or selective memory but at the same time, the present selves are also represented only by moments evolving around particular issues: physicality (beauty), personal/romantic relationships, and works.

The notion of space is important in the stories of the celebrities as they move from one place to another in conjunction with their career. Thus, their becoming of feminine and celebrity selves is very closely framed within space and time. The story of their lives can be appropriately attributed to these movements as well as their ability to travel between spaces and time. Thus, I can argue that if the whole story is “the life”, the chapters are the moments of life that may conclude at the space and time given, but at the same time, once this moment is framed in a bigger space and time, it begins to make sense in the making of the selves of the celebrities. Their identity, sense of self as well as femininity are thus continuously a process of becoming that even at the end of the story, while they are portrayed to have reached a certain equilibrium; a stage of peace and satisfaction, they are still pictured to continue to be in the process of becoming feminine as the time and space frame their situation. This structure highlights the feminine narrative structure as argued by Cixous (1981).

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