

Representation of Mujahadat al-Nafs in the Novel Anak Ahlam Bisbisah by Kamil Kilani

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Abstract

The abstract should be one paragraph with the same font and format as given here (1 space, Children's literature conveys moral values through the content of its stories, as well as through the narrative construction of characters, conflict, and the consequences of their actions. This study examines the representation of mujahadat al-nafs in Kamil Kilani's Arabic children's novel Ahlam Bisbisah, focusing on narrative structure and characterization. It employs a qualitative textual method involving close reading and narrative analysis. The data comprise actions, emotional responses, dialogue, repetitive patterns, spatial symbols, and transitions between waking and dreaming. The analysis identifies four interrelated representations of self-discipline: restraining spontaneous impulses, regulating emotions, recognizing personal limitations, and awakening from heedlessness. These dimensions are constructed through indirect characterization, a recurring impulse–failure–consequence pattern, the symbolism, and the narrative doubling of waking and dream states. The study's novelty lies in interpreting mujahadat al-nafs as an effect of literary form rather than merely as a religious message imposed on the story. Furthermore, the open ending positions child readers as active moral subjects who must imagine the protagonist's possible transformation.

Keywords: Ahlam Bisbisah; Islamic moral values; Kamil Kilani; narrative structure; self-control.

Abstract

Sastra anak menyajikan nilai moral melalui isi cerita serta penyusunan tokoh, konflik, dan konsekuensi tindakan secara naratif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan representasi mujahadat al-nafs dalam novel anak berbahasa Arab Ahlam Bisbisah karya Kamil Kilani melalui struktur naratif dan karakterisasi tokoh. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif tekstual dengan teknik close reading dan analisis naratif. Data berupa tindakan, respons emosional, dialog, pola pengulangan, simbol ruang, serta hubungan antara mimpi dan keadaan terjaga. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat bentuk representasi mujahadat al-nafs: penahanan dorongan spontan, pengelolaan emosi, pengenalan batas diri, dan kebangkitan dari kelengahan.

Keempatnya dibangun melalui karakterisasi tidak langsung, pola impuls–kegagalan–konsekuensi, simbol, serta peralihan antara ruang jaga dan ruang mimpi. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada pembacaan mujahadat al-nafs sebagai bagian dari strategi naratif, bukan sekadar pesan keagamaan yang disajikan dalam teks. Akhir cerita yang terbuka juga menempatkan pembaca anak sebagai subjek moral yang melengkapi kemungkinan perubahan tokoh.

Kata Kunci: Ahlam Bisbisah, Kamil Kilani, mujahadat al-nafs, pengendalian diri, struktur naratif.

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature plays an important role in shaping the character of the younger generation. As a work specifically designed for children, children's literature is not merely an entertainment text that fills free time, but rather an educational medium that operates subtly through stories, characters, and narrative conflicts.¹ Children's literature is created with a foundation, substance, and language tailored to the scope of a child's world, usually intended for preschool to elementary school-aged children.² This emphasizes that children's literature is consciously created with consideration for the inner world, cognitive capacity, and emotional needs of young readers. Nurgiyantoro³ strengthens this view by describing children's literature as a work that places the child's perspective and experiences as the main focal point of the narrative, so that the content and storytelling can "enter" into the child's way of thinking. In other words, the effectiveness of children's literature depends on its ability to adapt to the world of its readers.

From a functional perspective, experts agree that children's literature serves two mutually supportive functions: to entertain (*dulce*) and to educate (*utile*), as per Horace's esthetic legacy that remains relevant to this day. This includes the functions of children's literature as a means of education and character building, a medium for training reading habits, an instrument for intellectual and psychological development, a tool for accelerating language development, as well as a spark for imagination and creativity.⁴ Tarigan⁵ added that literature

¹ Heru Kurniawan, *Sastra Anak dan Keterampilan Berbahasa* (Jakarta: Pusat Perbukuan Depdiknas, 2009); Reza Sukma Nugraha, *Sastra Anak: Teori dan Aplikasi* (Penerbit Dikara, 2025).

² Herman Didipu and Sitti Rachmi Masie, *Sastra Anak: Apresiasi, Kajian, dan Pembelajarannya* (Gorontalo: Ideas Publishing, 2020); Riris K. Sarumpaet, *Pedoman Penelitian Sastra Anak* (Pusat Bahasa, Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional, 2010), https://books.google.com/books/about?id=fnNNywAACAAJ&redir_esc=y.

³ B. Nurgiyantoro, *Kajian Fiksi Anak* (Penerbit Ombak, 2015).

⁴ Kurniawan, *Sastra Anak dan Keterampilan Berbahasa*; Nugraha, *Sastra Anak*; Sarumpaet, *Pedoman Penelitian Sastra Anak*.

⁵ Gunawan Tarigan, *Mengajar Sastra Anak* (Bandung: Penerbit Tarsito, 2011).

generally serves to provide experiences, broaden horizons, and pass on cultural heritage from one generation to the next.

Kurniawan⁶ emphasized that children's literature is a work whose content and language are adjusted to the intellectual and emotional development levels of children. From another perspective, children's literature is a work that allows us to read and experience the world from a child's perspective, thereby fostering empathy and self-recognition.⁷ The four perspectives show that children's literature is a powerful medium for instilling moral values because it works not through direct instruction, but through the narrative experiences felt by the reader.

The connection between children's literature and moral values is organic. Nurgiyantoro⁸ states that the moral element in children's fiction should be an inseparable part of the work because children need practical guidance on good and bad behavior. Nugraha⁹ emphasized that parents and teachers can use literary works to educate and entertain children at the same time because moral messages are packaged in the form of engaging stories. The way moral values are conveyed in children's literature is generally implicit through the choices of the characters' attitudes, the consequences of their actions, and the resolution of conflicts experienced by the characters.

Among the various spectrum of values present in children's literature, Islamic values occupy an important position, especially in the context of Muslim societies, such as in the tradition of Arabic literature. Islamic values, which encompass the dimensions of faith, worship, and morality, are essentially part of a comprehensive moral system. Osman and Abdullah¹⁰ show that Islamic values are developed through Arabic poetry and stories by utilizing online literary sites as their medium of dissemination. In line with that, Al-Hawamleh¹¹ found that storytelling is one of the most effective methods in promoting moral awareness in religious

⁶ Kurniawan, *Sastra Anak dan Keterampilan Berbahasa*.

⁷ K. Mallan, "Children's Literature in Education," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, ed. Kathy Hytthen (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.157>.

⁸ B. Nurgiyantoro, *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2005).

⁹ Nugraha, *Sastra Anak*.

¹⁰ Reem A. H. Osman and Norizan Abdullah, "Development of Islamic Values through Arabic Poetry: Contribution of Arabic Literature Websites," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 22, no. 2 (2017): 263–285, <https://journals.iium.edu.my/shajarah/index.php/shaj/article/view/558>.

¹¹ Mahir Shafiq Al-Hawamleh, "Storytelling as promoting moral consciousness: Religious education teachers' perspectives," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 18, no. 10 (2019): 20–33, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.18.10.2>.

education. Meanwhile, Kholy¹², in his study on Egyptian children's literature, identifies that Arab children's literature is rich in ideological content and religious values that shape the cultural identity of the younger generation. Thomure et al.¹³ complete this picture by mentioning that children's literature is rich in values of discipline and reflects the community's interests in shaping children's character.

In several studies, the most dominant Islamic values in children's literature, particularly in the context of Arabic literature, include morality, justice, kindness, tolerance, humility, and social harmony.¹⁴ The narrative techniques used include storytelling, poetry, interactive media, and visual symbolism, such as mosques, religious clothing, and calligraphy, which serve to strengthen religious identity.¹⁵ Janson¹⁶, in his study, found that Islamic-themed children's literature is increasingly active in visualizing an inclusive and civilized future for Muslims, by incorporating values of faith into narrative formats that are relevant for young readers in various cultural contexts. Aisawi and Addhafeeri add that children's literature in the Arab Gulf region tends to present Islamic values and nationalism simultaneously within a modern and integrated framework. Naseef et al.¹⁷ found that illustrated books about the lives of Muslim children depict religion not as something separate, but as an inseparable part of daily life.

One of the important names in the realm of children's literature in the Arab world is Kamil Kilani (1897–1959). This Egyptian author and poet is known as the "father of Arabic children's literature" (al-adab al-athfal al-‘arabiyy) due to Kilani's significant contribution in establishing Arabic children's literature as an independent genre. Kilani wrote more than two hundred works for children, mostly adaptations of classic fairy tales from various world traditions, such as the tales of One Thousand and One Nights, Western fairy tales, and Asian folktales, which he reworked with Islamic values and specific moral principles. Kholy¹⁸ notes

¹² Nadia El Kholy, "Egyptian Children's Literature: Ideology and Politics," in *The Routledge Companion to International Children's Literature*, ed. John Stephens (New York: Routledge, 2017).

¹³ Hanadi T. Thomure, Samar Kreidieh, and Salam Baroudi, "Arabic Children's Literature: Glitzy Production, Disciplinary Content," *Issues in Educational Research* 30, no. 3 (2020): 1107–1126.

¹⁴ Kholy, "Egyptian Children's Literature."

¹⁵ Izzat N. Marzuki et al., "The Exploration of Interactive Islamic Visual Storytelling Illustration through Surah Luqman," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah (GJAT)* 15, no. 1 (2025): 88–99, <https://doi.org/10.7187/GJAT072025-10>.

¹⁶ Torsten Janson, "Islamic Children's Literature: Informal Religious Education in Diaspora," in *Handbook of Islamic Education*, ed. Holger Daun and Reza Arjmand (Cham: Springer, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53620-0_53-1.

¹⁷ Rahaf Naseef, Kathy G. Short, and Narges Zandi, "Religion as Life: Critical Content Analysis of Picturebooks About the Lives of Muslim Children," *Journal of Literacy Research* 56, no. 4 (2024): 444–464, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X241300348>.

¹⁸ Kholy, "Egyptian Children's Literature."

that Egyptian children's literature, where Kilani worked and had an influence, is one of the most ideological and moralistic in the Arab world, with a tradition of using children's stories as instruments for character building.

Kilani's selection as the subject of study is based on several considerations. First, his position as a pioneer whose works became a reference for subsequent Arab children's literature authors. Second, his consistency in implicitly embedding Islamic moral values through fables and animal stories as a tradition rooted in classical Arab literature such as *Kalilah wa Dimnah*. Third, his works are always relevant to readers of every era.

One of Kilani's works that is interesting to study from the perspective of Islamic values is the short novel *Ahlan Bisbisah* (*Dreams of Bisbisah*).¹⁹ This work tells the story of a female cat named Bisbisah who repeatedly chases mice and birds without careful consideration, then suffers the consequences in the form of exhaustion, pain, and disappointment. The repetitive narrative pattern is a narrative strategy used by Kilani as a pedagogical instrument to instill a moral message about the dangers of impulsive actions. As a fable, *Ahlan Bisbisah* uses animal characters to convey moral criticism without being tied to a specific social context, making it an effective narrative strategy.²⁰

The most prominent Islamic value in *Ahlan Bisbisah* is the value of self-control, which in Islamic tradition is known as *mughadad al-nafs*. Self-control refers to a person's ability to resist the urges of desires, manage emotions, and not act hastily without careful consideration. The Qur'an mentions the importance of this value in various places, namely: Surah An-Nazi'at [79]: 40–41, Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 134, and Surah Al-Anbiya' [21]: 37. In *Ahlan Bisbisah*, the value of self-control is implicitly present through narrative criticism of the characters' behavior.

Research on moral values and self-control in children's literature has rapidly developed in recent years. Septiaji, Kusmana, and Syarifah²¹ found that Islamic children's stories implicitly incorporate values of honesty, empathy, and responsibility into the plot and characters, allowing

¹⁹ Kamil Kilani, *Ahlan Bisbisah* (Kairo: Muassasah Hindawi li al-Ta'lim wa al-Tsaqafah, 2012).

²⁰ Torsten Janson, "A Halal Happy Ever After: Envisioning Muslim Futures in Islamically Minded Children's Literature," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 13, no. 1 (2024): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-bja10114>.

²¹ Aji Septiaji, Sulaeman Kusmana, and Emah Syarifah, "Estetika dan Etika dalam Dongeng Anak Islami," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies (IJIS)* 1, no. 2 (2025): 99–114, <https://doi.org/10.62567/ijis.v1i2.856>.

children to absorb these values while enjoying the story. Syahrul and Saptawuryandari²² examined three fictional works by Asma Nadia and found that Islamic values are depicted through the portrayal of characters who are patient, sincere, diligent in worship, and caring toward others as ideal character models. Auliani, Lubis, and Marsell²³ analyzed the novel *Ning Anak Wayang* and found that the moral values in the novel are mapped into three relationships, namely human–God, human–self, and human–fellow humans. Sari et al.²⁴ found fourteen character education values in the novel *Si Anak Savana* by Tere Liye, including discipline, hard work, independence, and responsibility. Kustiawan et al.²⁵ identified an exclusive tendency in several post-reform Indonesian popular Islamic novels that almost do not touch on the theme of tolerance, thus recommending the need for readings that go beyond mere appreciation of Islamic-themed literary works.

From those studies, there is a research gap that has not yet been filled. Empirical research on the impact of Islamic values in children's literature on children's behavior and identity is still limited. Similarly, studies that focus content analysis toward more applied pedagogical strategies.²⁶ More specifically, the value of self-control (*mujahadat al-nafs*) as an independent object of study has not received special attention. Ahlam Bisbisah's work itself has never been studied from the perspective of self-control values with an argumentative basis in the verses of the Qur'an, even though this text contains a very rich narrative pattern to be analyzed from that dimension.

Based on the aforementioned description, this research formulates the problem of how the values of self-control (*mujahadat al-nafs*) are represented in the novel through the narrative techniques used by Kilani and how these values can be argued within the framework of Islamic teachings based on relevant verses of the Qur'an.

²² Novaria Syahrul and Nurweni Saptawuryandari, "Understanding the Representation of Islamic Values Through Three Fiction Works by Asma Nadia," in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Religious Literature and Heritage (ISLAGE 2021)* (Dordrecht: Atlantis Press, 2022), 45–52, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220206.006>.

²³ Fitri Auliani, Rahmat Lubis, and Marsella Marsella, "Nilai Moral dalam Novel *Ning Anak Wayang Karya Niken dan Anjar*: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra," *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan* 4, no. 2 (2025): 145–156, <https://doi.org/10.56127/jushpen.v4i2.2050>.

²⁴ N. Sari and E. Putu, "Contribution of Children's Literature in the Formation of Character of Elementary School Children," *Mudra Jurnal Seni Budaya* 39, no. 4 (2024): 2158, <https://doi.org/10.31091/mudra.v39i4.2158>.

²⁵ Muhammad Kustiawan et al., "Fragmentation of Dakwah Media: Exploring Exclusive Islam in Indonesia Post-Reform Popular Islamic Novels," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 1 (2023): 246–275, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v27i1.530>.

²⁶ Naseef, Short, and Zandi, "Religion as Life"; Thomure, Kreidieh, and Baroudi, "Arabic Children's Literature."

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive-analytical method with an approach based on the theory of Islamic moral values derived from the verses of the Qur'an. The selection of this method and approach is tailored to the characteristics of the research object, namely Arabic children's literary texts that implicitly convey moral messages through their narrative structure. The descriptive-analytical method is a research procedure that operates through two interconnected stages: systematically describing the facts, and then analyzing them to produce a deeper understanding.²⁷

The data for this research consists of narrative excerpts from the novel *Ahlam Bisbisah* that implicitly contain moral dimensions. The data cannot be measured quantitatively, but must be read, described in its narrative context, and then interpreted in terms of Islamic values. The descriptive-analytical method allows the researcher to move from factual description to argumentative interpretation without losing their footing in the text.

The approach used in this research is the theory of Islamic moral values derived from the teachings of the Qur'an. This theory emphasizes that the Islamic values that emerge in literary works are a transformation of Islamic teachings, which include the pillars of faith, the pillars of Islam, and the value of *ihsan*. These values are manifested in literary elements such as plot, characters, setting, and theme, and reflect the author's views on truth and the ideal life. In literary studies, Islamic moral values are generally mapped into three main dimensions: *aqeedah* (theological values), *sharia* (worship values), and *akhlaq* (social values and values toward oneself).²⁸

This research specifically focuses on the dimension of *akhlaq*, particularly *akhlaq* toward oneself, which in the Islamic ethical tradition is known as *mujahadat al-nafs*. The use of Quranic verses as the basis for analysis is a valid step in the tradition of Islamic literary research. Ratna emphasizes that literary research using a value-based approach requires a clear normative framework, and in the context of Islamic literature, the Qur'an is the most authoritative normative source. This approach does not assume that the author explicitly quotes these verses,

²⁷ Suwardi Endraswara, *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra: Epistemologi, Model, Teori, dan Aplikasi* (Yogyakarta: CAPS, 2011); Nyoman Kutha Ratna, *Teori, Metode, dan Teknik Penelitian Sastra: Dari Strukturalisme Hingga Poststrukturalisme Perspektif Wacana Naratif* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004); Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2021).

²⁸ Endraswara, *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*; Faruk, *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra: Dari Strukturalisme Genetik Sampai Post-Modernisme* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010).

but rather that the literary text born from the Islamic cultural tradition carries values that can be interpreted in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an.²⁹

The research procedure is carried out through five sequential and mutually supportive stages. First, a thorough reading. The researcher reads the text of Ahlam Bisbisah in its entirety and repeatedly to obtain a comprehensive narrative picture. Second, data identification. The researcher identifies and records all quotes in Arabic that contain elements of character behavior, emotional responses, and consequences of actions related to the dimension of self-control. Third, data classification. The identified data is classified into four dimensions of self-control formulated based on text reading and literature review. Fourth, interpretation and argumentation. Each classified data is interpreted in its meaning within the overall context of the text, then argued with reference to relevant verses of the Qur'an. Fifth, drawing conclusions.

DISCUSSION

Ahlam Bisbisah is a novel that features a female cat named Bisbisah as the main character. The novel tells the story of Bisbisah who repeatedly sees prey, is driven to chase it without consideration, fails to catch it, and suffers painful consequences. This pattern repeats at least twice in the text, creating a rhythm that is both didactic and dramatic. Child readers, through the repeated experiences of the character, are invited to empathetically understand that acting impulsively will always lead to loss.

Kilani, as an author known for paying great attention to the pedagogical function of children's literature, chose animals as the main characters for a reason. Fables and animal stories in the tradition of Arabic literature, from Kalilah wa Dimnah to modern works, use non-human characters to convey moral critiques more freely because they are not bound by specific social contexts. Janson³⁰ notes that effective Islamic children's literature packages moral messages in a narrative format that does not feel didactic, but rather flows naturally from the characters' experiences. By placing the message of self-control within the body of a cat, Kilani simplifies the complex concept of Islamic ethics into a story that can be understood by child readers, while its meaning remains relevant to adult readers.

²⁹ Endraswara, *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*.

³⁰ Janson, "A Halal Happy Ever After."

In this story, four dimensions of self-control are found. The first dimension, controlling spontaneous impulses (kaff al-nafs), is based on the concept of Islamic moral psychology which acknowledges that the ego (nafs ammarah) has a tendency to drive actions without consideration. This concept is rooted in Surah Yusuf [12]: 53, which mentions the soul as a force that continuously drives toward evil, except by the mercy of Allah. The second dimension, emotional management, is derived from the dimension of self-morality in the classification of Islamic values commonly used in Islamic literary studies,³¹ which places the ability to control emotional responses as a sign of moral maturity. The third dimension, acceptance of self-limitations, is based on the concepts of qana'ah and ridha in Islamic Sufi tradition, namely the ability to accept realities that do not align with desires as a form of spiritual maturity. The fourth dimension, the awakening of consciousness from negligence (ghaflah), refers to the Qur'anic concept that describes negligence as a dangerous condition for the human soul. Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*³² mentions ghaflah as the main source of moral decline because it distances humans from reflecting on their actions. These four dimensions are formulated inductively-deductively and emerge in the reading of the text *Ahlam Bisbisah*, simultaneously confirmed by the framework of Islamic moral value theory.

The First Dimension: Subduing Spontaneous Impulse (Kaff al-Nafs)

The most prominent and first dimension in *Ahlam Bisbisah* is the control of spontaneous urges, or in the Islamic terminology it is called kaff al-nafs. This dimension is the capacity of a person to resist the first response that comes when faced with a stimulus, especially those of a desire or lust kind. We can see this push is coming from first line of text. Following is the data 1:

بِسْبِيَةِ شَافَتِ الْفَارَ قُدَّامَ عَيْنَيْهَا³³

Bisbisah saw the rat in front of his eyes.

³¹ Endraswara, *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*; Faruk, *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra*.

³² Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.).

³³ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 5.

The data show the starting point of a spontaneous push in the narrative. Tokoh tertarik pada objek buruan ketika ia melihatnya, tanpa jeda, tanpa pertimbangan. The following 2 data immediately follow this condition:

بِسْبِيَةِ رَاحَتٍ تَجْرِي وَرَاءَ الْفَارِ³⁴

Bisbisah ran after the rat.

The data shows the absence of a pause between perception and action as an important narrative marker. In the study of moral psychology, the ability to delay response is one of the main components of self-control. The Qur'an in Surah Al-Anbiya' [21]: 37 states that humans are created with a hasty nature as a fundamental trait that needs to be managed, not allowed to dominate behavior. In line with that, Surah Al-Isra' [17]: 11 emphasizes the tendency of humans to act quickly without considering the consequences, so awareness of this trait actually becomes the starting point for self-control itself.

Explicit evidence of the rejection of the pause is found in data 3, when Bisbisah speaks in her dream:

قَالَتْ: لَا بُدَّ أَنْ أَجْرِيَ بِلَا انْتِظَارٍ³⁵

He said: I have to run without waiting.

³⁴ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 5.

³⁵ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 1.

Data 3 shows that the phrase "without waiting" (bila intidzar) is the character's inner confession of their dangerous tendency, which is to reject pause and reflection. Kilani places this confession precisely in the context of a dream, as if to show that the uncontrolled impulsive tendencies in the character's conscious life will continue to operate in the character's subconscious. Auliani, Lubis, and Marsella³⁶ in their study found that the dimension of self-control is strongest in the relationship between a person and themselves, because it is directly related to the character's ability to manage their desires before those desires impact others. This is also evident in the following data 4:

الفأر راح يَجْرِي لِيَنْجُو مِنْ بَسْبَسَةِ³⁷

The mouse ran to escape from Bisbisah.

The data shows that Bisbisah's uncontrollable urges not only harm himself but also instill fear in other beings. Surah Al-Ma'idah [5]: 87 prohibits humans from exceeding limits, a principle that is relevant for interpreting Bisbisah's actions that turn into a threat to those around her.

Findings in this first dimension show that Kilani builds his moral critique not through direct statements, but through "implicit esthetics" in Islamic children's tales, where values are present through the consequences experienced by the characters, not through advice spoken by the narrator.³⁸ In this context, the absence of a pause between stimulus and action in the character Bisbisah serves a dual purpose. Narratively, the text drives the story, but pedagogically it serves as a mirror for the reader about uncontrolled actions. Kilani uses the character's weakness as a learning instrument.

³⁶ Auliani, Lubis, and Marsella, "Nilai Moral dalam Novel Ning Anak."

³⁷ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 5.

³⁸ Septiaji, Kusmana, and Syarifah, "Estetika dan Etika dalam Dongeng Anak."

Additionally, Kilani places the character's admission of impulsivity precisely within the context of a dream (data 3). Kilani uses a similar logic: Bisbisah's dream as a narrative event is an externalization of her deepest desires. If in conscious life impulsive actions are still framed by situations and environments, in dreams those impulses emerge purely without external context. The statement "I must run without waiting" is the honest voice of the character Bisbisah. This interpretation aligns with Al-Ghazali's view in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*³⁹ that an untrained soul will continue to produce desires even when the body is resting. The pedagogical implications for child readers are very clear, namely that self-control is related to the inner development of an individual.

From the perspective of Islamic moral value theory, the dimension of kaff al-nafs reflects the most fundamental level of self-control in the hierarchy of Islamic ethics. Before someone can be fair to others, patient in facing trials, or grateful for blessings, they must first be able to delay their spontaneous responses to stimuli. Faruk⁴⁰, within the framework of his sociological literary theory, reminds us that the values presented in literary works are always rooted in the worldview of their authors. For Kilani, who grew up in the tradition of early 20th-century Egyptian Islamic thought heavily influenced by reformist thinkers like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, self-control is the foundation of a civilized and faithful human being. Ahlam Bisbisah, in this reading, is a manifesto about the meaning of being a rational being and responsible for one's own impulses.

Dimensi Kedua: Pengelolaan Emosi

The second dimension of self-control in Ahlam Bisbisah is emotional management. After each failure, Bisbisah experiences a series of emotional reactions that are explicitly expressed in the text. One of the sharpest moments is evident in data 5:

³⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*.

⁴⁰ Faruk, *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra*.

بِسَبْسَةِ وَاقِفَةٍ تَنْظُرُ إِلَى الْفَارِ مُغْتَاظَةً⁴¹

Bisbisah stood watching the mouse with annoyance.

The data shows the word *mughtazhah*, which refers to a state of anger mixed with annoyance, an emotion that in Islamic tradition needs to be controlled because it can lead to more harmful actions. Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 134 describes the righteous as those who restrain their anger (*al-kazhimin al-ghaidh*), which portrays emotional management as part of the highest moral qualities in Islam. Bisbisah's annoyance, instead of prompting her to stop and reflect on what happened, actually fuels the next impulse. Pasaribu and Fatmaira⁴² found that morally strong Islamic novels feature characters who are able to be patient and have faith, precisely as a way to demonstrate how important these values are to develop. In *Ahlam Bisbisah*, the absence of patience in the characters is further confirmed in data 6:

بِسَبْسَةِ رَجَعَتْ إِلَى الْبَيْتِ زَغْلَانَةً⁴³

Bisbisah returned home feeling sad.

The data shows that unmanaged sadness does not lead to reflection, but rather continues as an unresolved emotional cycle. Moments after walking in the park, Bisbisah saw the birds again, and the urge to hunt reemerged. This is a narrative critique about the relationship between unmanaged emotions and recurring impulses. The peak of accumulated negative emotions is evident in data 7:

⁴¹ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 6.

⁴² Tigor Pasaribu and Zakia Fatmaira, "Analisis Nilai Religius Sastra Novel 99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa Karya Rangga Almahendra dan Hanum Salsabiela Rais: Kajian Nilai Religius Hubungan Manusia dengan Tuhan," *Journal on Education* 5, no. 2 (2023): 3418–3429, <https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v5i2.1255>.

⁴³ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 7.

Bisbisah is sad, tired, and in pain.

The data shows three states that appear simultaneously as cumulative evidence of the failure to manage impulses and emotions: emotional disturbances, physical fatigue, and illness. Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 134 and Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 195 together support this interpretation: the former commands the control of anger, while the latter forbids humans from bringing themselves to destruction. Saputra⁴⁵, in his study, identifies that discipline and emotional responsibility are two moral components that cannot be separated from the formation of a complete character.

Findings in the second dimension indicate that Kilani understands the relationship between emotions and actions in a more complex manner than it appears on the surface. The failure to manage emotions in this text not only results in passing sadness but also in the repetition of similar impulsive actions. This is a psychologically relevant insight: unprocessed negative emotions do not disappear; instead, they transform into energy that drives subsequent behavior. When Bisbisah returns home feeling sad (data 7), and then in the next few sentences sees a bird and is compelled to chase it again, the text is describing a condition known in contemporary psychology as the impulse-failure-negative emotion-new impulse cycle. Kilani understands this dynamic and uses it as a narrative framework.

From the perspective of Islamic values, Bisbisah's failure to manage her emotions can be interpreted as the absence of one of the highest virtues praised by the Qur'an, namely patience (sabr). Unlike controlling spontaneous impulses related to outward actions, managing emotions pertains to the inner condition after something undesirable occurs. Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 134, which mentions al-kazhimin al-ghaidh, uses an active verb that implies an active process of control, not just a passive state of not being angry. This means that emotional management in

⁴⁴ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 8.

⁴⁵ Nurcholis Saputra, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Akhlak dalam Novel Cahaya di Penjuru Hati Karya Alberthiene Endah," *Sarasvati* 3, no. 1 (2021): 48–62, <https://doi.org/10.30742/sv.v3i1.1200>.

Islam is not something that happens automatically, but rather a conscious effort that needs to be trained. In the context of children's literature, Didipu and Masie⁴⁶ remind us that a good story presents moral values through the plot, characters, and conflict, so that the moral message is not only conveyed directly but also implied in the choices of attitude and their consequences. Ahlam Bisbisah does this by presenting the absence of emotional management as something real and felt, not merely a violation of norms judged from the outside.

What needs special attention in this discussion is the accumulation of sadness, fatigue, and pain as the peak of the second-dimensional narrative. These three conditions are not separate events, but rather layers of interconnected consequences: failure leads to frustration, unmanaged frustration drives new pursuits, new pursuits result in physical exhaustion, and physical exhaustion accompanied by repeated failure leads to a state of illness. Kilani constructs these layers with narrative precision for a text intended for children. This finding aligns with Endraswara's⁴⁷ view that high-value literary works can produce multi-layered understandings: on the surface, it is a story about a cat that fails to hunt, but at a deeper level, it reveals unmanaged emotions that can erode a person's physical and spiritual condition.

Third Dimension: Acceptance of Self-Limitations

The third dimension of self-control is the ability to accept self-limitations, a quality that in the tradition of Islamic ethics is associated with the concepts of qana'ah and ridha, which is the ability to accept unchangeable circumstances with an open heart. In Ahlam Bisbisah, this dimension is present through moments of the character facing their limitations but being unable to accept them. The sharpest moment is evident in data 8:

⁴⁶ Didipu and Masie, *Sastra Anak*.

⁴⁷ Endraswara, *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*.

بِسْبِيسَةٍ لَا تَسْتَطِيعُ الدُّخُولَ فِي الرِّجَاجَةِ⁴⁸

Bisbisah cannot get into the bottle.

The data shows an absolute physical limitation. The size of Bisbisah's body did not allow her to follow the mouse into the bottle. However, instead of stopping and accepting that the target cannot be achieved, Bisbisah remained standing with annoyance. Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 286 affirms that Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity. This verse has two-way implications. From the divine side, God gives tests that are in accordance with the servant's capacity. From the human side, humans need to recognize their own limits and not push themselves beyond those capacities. Mubarak and Humairo⁴⁹ show that characters who can sincerely accept reality are depicted as having higher moral maturity. The absence of this quality is what actually drives the conflict in Ahlam Bisbisah, with the peak evident in the following data 9 and 10:

بِسْبِيسَةٍ وَقَعَتْ فِي بَرْمِيلِ مَاءٍ⁵⁰

Bisbisah fell into the water barrel.

بِسْبِيسَةٍ لَقِيَتْ نَفْسَهَا فِي بَرْمِيلِ الْمَاءِ⁵¹

Bisbisah threw herself into the water barrel.

⁴⁸ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 6.

⁴⁹ Ahmad Mubarak, "The Values of Islamic Religious Education in the Novel 'Janji' by Tere Liye and Its Relevance to Education," *AL-MUADDIB: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Kependidikan* 7, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.46773/muaddib.v7i3.1809>.

⁵⁰ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 7.

⁵¹ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 8.

The data shows two versions of the narrative about the same event. The second version is stronger narratively because it uses the phrase "throwing himself" which semantically brings the action closer to a choice, rather than just an accident. Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 195, which prohibits humans from throwing themselves into destruction, serves as the foundation for interpreting these two pieces of data. When Bisbisah woke up and found the reality in the following data 11 and 12:

لَمْ يَجِدْ مَا رَأَاهُ فِي الْأَحْلَامِ⁵²

He did not find what he saw in the dream.

لَمْ يَجِدْ غَيْرَ الْبَرْمِيلِ جُنْبَهُ⁵³

He found nothing but a barrel beside him.

The data shows that the text reaches its moral peak. The water barrel becomes a symbol of the consequence of an uncontrolled desire. The reality that Bisbisah discovers upon waking is a reflection of the reality he rejects when conscious, namely that uncontrolled desires do not bring satisfaction, but only leave behind losses.

Findings in the third dimension show the relationship between self-control and the concept of reality from an Islamic perspective. When Bisbisah does not find what he saw in the dream (data 11) and only finds a barrel beside him (data 12), the text is juxtaposing two types of reality: the desired reality and the existing reality. Acceptance of self-limitations, in this

⁵² Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 14.

⁵³ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 14.

reading, demonstrates a fundamental ability, namely accepting the distance between desire and reality without being dominated by that desire.

This concept has a strong counterpart in the Islamic Sufi tradition. Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* distinguishes between healthy desires (*iradah*) and desires that become obsessions (*hawa*). The first can be controlled by reason and faith, while the second actually controls humans. Bisbisah, throughout the story, is in the second condition. He does not have desires, but is instead controlled by them. Every moment when he faces his physical limitations, he does not use those limitations as information to adjust his behavior, but only as a new source of frustration. This is what makes this third dimension morally convey a lesson about accepting failure and the ability to read reality clearly as a prerequisite for wise actions.

Nurgiyantoro⁵⁴ states that characters in children's fiction should convey messages about good and bad behavior through the consequences depicted, not through lectures. In *Ahlam Bisbisah*, the consequences of the inability to accept one's limitations are presented gradually and increasingly severely: from merely standing annoyed in front of a bottle (data 8), then falling into a water barrel (data 9), to waking up in a condition where one does not find what was dreamed of (data 11). The escalation of these consequences is a pedagogical structure that shows that refusing to accept one's limitations has increasingly serious repercussions if not corrected promptly. The relevance of this finding for readers is a reminder that *qana'ah* and *ridha* are not passive or resigned attitudes that dampen one's spirit, but rather wisdom that allows a person to see reality clearly and choose actions that align with their abilities.

The Fourth Dimension: The Awakening of Consciousness from Negligence

The final dimension is the awakening of consciousness from negligence (*ghaflah*). This dimension is the most symbolically rich dimension in *Ahlam Bisbisah*. The entire story moves within two realms of consciousness, namely the waking realm and the dream realm. In both, Bisbisah displays the same behavior: impulsive, uncontrolled, and not learning from failure. That most of the strongest impulses occur in dreams is shown in data 13 and 14:

⁵⁴ Nurgiyantoro, *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*.

بِسْبِسَةِ نَحْلُمُ، وَهِيَ نَائِمَةٌ⁵⁵

Bisbisah dreams while she sleeps.

بِسْبِسَةِ شَأَفَتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا الْقَارِ⁵⁶

Bisbisah saw a rat in her dream.

The data shows that uncontrolled desires in the conscious life continue to operate in the character's subconscious. In the tradition of Arabic and Islamic literature, sleep is often used as a metaphor for negligence (ghaflah), a state when the soul is unalert and easily controlled by desires. Surah Asy-Syams [91]: 7-10 states that the soul has both good and bad potential, both of which need to be nurtured and directed. The presence of dreams that dominate most of the text is Kilani's way of illustrating that an untrained soul will continue to produce unresolved desires. The strongest call in the text appears at the end of the story, in data 15:

صَحَّ النَّوْمُ، يَا بَسْبِسَةَ!⁵⁷

Wake up from your sleep, oh Bisbisah!

The data shows a call that is not merely about waking from biological sleep. The story is a metaphor for the awakening of moral consciousness. In Surah Al-Hasyr [59]: 18, Allah commands humans to pay attention to what they have done for tomorrow. That is a reflection

⁵⁵ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 8.

⁵⁶ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 9.

⁵⁷ Kilani, *Ahlam Bisbisah*, 14.

and self-evaluation that can only be done by someone who has "awakened" from their negligence. The character's awareness of their mistake often becomes a moral turning point in a narrative. In Ahlam Bisbisah, this turning point appears in a subtle form. Kilani does not present Bisbisah as suddenly changed. The story ends with an open call, and whether the character truly awakens and changes is not explicitly shown. This is a careful narrative strategy, inviting child readers to draw their own moral conclusions. The active participation of readers in drawing moral conclusions like that actually deepens the process of value internalization.⁵⁸

Kilani chose to end the story with an open call, rather than with an explicit change or repentance of the character. This narrative choice reflects that true change, as taught in the tradition of Islamic ethics, can never be forced from the outside or occur in a single dramatic moment. It is a long process that begins with the awakening of consciousness, followed by reflection, and only then results in behavioral change. Kilani does not present the entire process in her text because a short children's text does not allow for that. What he does is only present the starting point, namely the call to "wake up," which is an invitation to have awareness.

The narrative structure that leaves the end of the story open places the reader as an active moral subject. Child readers are not given an answer about whether Bisbisah ultimately changes; instead, they are given a question. In that question lies the true moral message. Nurgiyantoro⁵⁹ states that good children's literature places the child's experience as the main point of the narrative, including moral experiences. By leaving the resolution open, Kilani implicitly invites child readers to project themselves into a situation like Bisbisah, asking, "If you were Bisbisah, what would you do after waking up?" "This question is far more effective as an instrument for character development than the answers that are already available."

Repetitive Narrative Pattern as a Pedagogical Strategy

One prominent aspect of Ahlam Bisbisah is the use of a repetitive narrative pattern as a pedagogical strategy. Kilani does not just show Bisbisah failing once. He displays repeated failures with an almost identical pattern, namely seeing the target, wanting to catch it, running

⁵⁸ Humayrah Nabihasnah, Mutiara Alhayyu, and Gusmaneli Gusmaneli, "Strategi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Islam Melalui Pendekatan Storytelling untuk Membentuk Akhlak Mulia Anak Usia Dini," *Reflection: Islamic Education Journal* 2, no. 2 (2025): 112–124, <https://doi.org/10.61132/reflection.v2i2.793>.

⁵⁹ Nurgiyantoro, *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*.

or jumping, failing, and facing the consequences. This repetition serves a dual function in the context of self-control values.

First, repetition shows that impulsive behavior is not an occasional accident, but rather a persistent behavior pattern as long as there is no change in the way the character responds to stimuli. Unchanged habits will continue to repeat, and each repetition reinforces that pattern. This is depicted in the scene where Bisbisah runs after a rat and jumps over the fence to catch a bird. The pattern of Bisbisah's movement from observing directly to acting occurs in almost identical ways in both incidents.

Second, repetition provides narrative emphasis that allows child readers to understand that what happens is not a coincidence, but rather a predictable consequence of certain actions. Nabihasnah, Alhayyu, and Gusmaneli⁶⁰ emphasize that stories operate on an emotional and imaginative level before reaching the cognitive level. In *Ahlam Bisbisah*, the repetition of the narrative pattern works exactly like that, meaning that before a child conceptually understands what self-control is, they have already felt through empathetic experience with Bisbisah that impulsive actions are unpleasant and harmful. Janson⁶¹ also notes that the values of faith and morality in Islamic children's literature are often presented through familiar and repetitive narrative formats, making them feel less foreign to child readers.

The analysis of *Ahlam Bisbisah* has significant implications for character education. Children's stories effectively help children understand the values of kindness, justice, honesty, and empathy within the framework of Islamic values because stories work naturally without being didactic. Syahrul and Saptawuryandari add that teachers and parents are encouraged to choose works with Islamic themes as supporting readings for religious literacy and character formation, but remain critical of any stereotypes and biases that may exist. *Ahlam Bisbisah* meets the criteria of a work worthy of consideration in this context because it conveys the value of self-control without demeaning stereotypes and without an exclusive attitude.

⁶⁰ Nabihasnah, Alhayyu, and Gusmaneli, "Strategi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Islam Melalui Pendekatan."

⁶¹ Janson, "Islamic Children's Literature."

CONCLUSION

This research shows that mujahadat al-nafs in Ahlam Bisbisah is formed through the relationship between characterization, conflict, repetition, symbolism, and an open-ended conclusion. Bisbisah is characterized indirectly through the pattern of seeing–chasing–failing–suffering the consequences that keeps repeating. That pattern results in four forms of self-control that the character has not yet achieved, namely the restraint of spontaneous impulses, emotional management, self-boundary recognition, and awakening from negligence. The bottle and the water barrel bring the character's desires into confrontation with limits and physical consequences, while dreams multiply the conflict in different realms of consciousness. The novelty of this research lies in the placement of mujahadat al-nafs as a meaning produced by the literary structure, rather than as a teaching explicitly presented in the story's quotes. The verses of the Qur'an serve as the ethical foundation for these textual findings. The ambiguous ending of Bisbisah's story allows readers to imagine the continuation of the character's actions and engage as subjects of moral reflection.

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