

**The Collapse Of The Symbolic Order: A Lacanian Psychoanalysis Of The Mother Figure
In The Movie Norma: Antara Mertua Dan Menantu****Nuri Adlina¹, Desthia Amalia²**^{1,2,3,4} Faculty of Literature and Culture / English Literature, Universitas Gunadarma**Article History**

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Abstract: The mother figure in Indonesian families is traditionally constructed as the guardian of moral values. However, the movie *Norma: Antara Mertua dan Menantu* depicts a radical deviation where a mother engages in an incestuous relationship with her son-in-law. This study aims to analyze the psychic dynamics of the mother character, Rina, using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research dissects visual and verbal data representing the three Lacanian registers: The Real, The Imaginary, and The Symbolic. The results indicate that Rina's transgression is not merely a moral failure but a structural collapse of the Symbolic order caused by the absence of "The Name-of-the-Father" (the husband's function) in the household. The study finds that the mother attempts to reconstruct her fragmented ego through the Imaginary phase by using her son-in-law as a mirror to reclaim her lost youth (The Real). This research concludes that the incestuous affair serves as a tragic defense mechanism against domestic alienation, ultimately leading to the destruction of the family structure.

Keywords: Lacanian psychoanalysis, mother-in-law, incest, The Name-of-the-Father, Symbolic order.

INTRODUCTION

Families in the social structure of Indonesian society do not only function biologically but also serve as a place for fundamental moral formation. Generally, a family consists of a father, mother, and children, each having specific responsibilities. Among these roles, the mother figure holds a crucial position, particularly in domestic management. Nuroniyah (2023) asserts that women or mothers are officially recognized as having a central role in managing household affairs as best as possible. Thus, it can be underscored that in the domestic realm, the mother is a key figure who ensures the operational continuity and harmony of a family.

However, the centrality of this role is often pseudo under the shadow of patriarchal culture. This is in line with the opinion of Reza et al. (2024), who highlight that women's space is often limited by male control, both within the family environment and society at large. This lack of autonomy is manifested clearly in the mother figure. In the family structure, the mother's position is often constructed solely as a guardian of morality, yet she does not possess dominant power. Consequently, the mother becomes a mute symbol of norms; she is required to maintain the household order without having a vocal role equal to the father. In other words, the mother is not permitted to have desires, ambitions, or a voice that could rival the father's authority.

However, the ideal construction of a 'mute' and 'desireless' mother figure can also collapse, as seen in the movie *Norma: Antara Mertua dan Menantu*. This movie is based on a true story that depicts a mother figure who differs from her ideal image. The movie *Norma* raises the intrigue that occurs between a mother-in-law and a son-in-law, which should not have happened. In the movie, Rina, who is the

biological mother of the character Norma, has an affair with her own son-in-law. This behavior violates the incest taboo emphasized by Koentjaraningrat (2004) as a fundamental prohibition in Indonesian kinship. With the occurrence of the incest taboo between Rina and her son-in-law, the mother figure no longer appears as an ideal figure who guards moral dynamics in the family but becomes a destructive figure for her child's household.

Although the theme of domestic conflict is often raised in research, specific studies regarding the sexual deviation of a mother-in-law are still very minimal. Previous research, such as that raised by Rahmah et al. (2019) and Kalalo (2021), limited their research to verbal communication friction and differences when living in the same house, and they also did not focus on literary works. Meanwhile, regarding literary studies touching on similar themes, Pradnyana et al. (2019) discussed the novel *Suti*. However, the analysis presented was limited to Sigmund Freud's id, ego, and superego and did not touch upon traumatic unconscious aspects. There has been no research that uses the lens of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis. Therefore, this research is present to fill this gap by analyzing the mother character in the movie *Norma: Antara Mertua dan Menantu* using Lacan's psychoanalytic theory.

In this study, the author focuses on the triadic introduced by Lacan: The real, the imaginary, and the Symbolic. According to Lacan (in Mu'afiyah, 2025), the real refers to aspects of reality that cannot be fully understood or expressed through language. The real is the world where traumatic experiences and uncertainty exist. Then, the imaginary relates to self-image and relationships with others, and how individuals build identity through social interaction. This self-image is an illusion that does not reflect actual emotional reality. Furthermore, the symbolic is the world of language, law, and social norms where individuals interact with society and build identity through symbols. Moreover, the concept of the name-of-the-father becomes crucial. According to Hook (2016), the name-of-the-father functions as a primary signifier that anchors the symbolic order, representing the influence of cultural and social law. Importantly, this concept does not necessarily refer to a biological father. According to Vanheule (in Hook, 2016) the name-of-the-father acts as a symbolic function or an internalized compass that subjects individuals to culturally viable principles.

The psychoanalytic triadic brought by Jacques Lacan was chosen by the author in this study to dissect the character of Rina. The mother figure in the movie *Norma* can be read as a failure of the symbolic order, where ideally, a mother should not have an attraction to her son-in-law. However, the behavior shown by Rina demonstrates the opposite, or in other words, the symbolic order in the mother figure here collapses. Therefore, Lacan's psychoanalytic triad is used to find out deeper about the character of Rina and the background behind the behavior that deviates from her role as a mother in the family. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the personality of the mother figure in the movie *Norma*. The main focus of this article is to see how imaginary desire in the mother figure is able to collapse the family's symbolic order and how this can emerge from the side of the real from the mother.

RESEARCHMETHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. According to Ratna (2013), qualitative methods in literature are tasked with describing facts followed by analysis to provide a deep understanding of the work. The approach used is a psychoanalytic approach. This method was chosen to get the psychic depth of the character and the structure of desire that is not visible on the surface of the narration. The object of this research is the movie titled *Norma: Antara Mertua dan Menantu*. The focus of the analysis is centered on the mother (mother-in-law) character as a subject experiencing intrapsychic conflict dynamics. The research data consists of visual data (screenshots of scenes) and verbal data (dialogue between characters) representing the mother character's desire.

Data collection was carried out using observation and note-taking techniques. As explained by Endraswara (2008), this technique involves careful observation of narrative units to be subsequently recorded as raw data. The researcher watched the movie carefully to identify crucial scenes, then took screenshots of visual moments representing narcissistic or traumatic expressions, and created transcripts of relevant dialogues. Data analysis was performed interpretatively using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. The collected data were classified into three psychic orders, namely: (1) The imaginary to analyze scenes showing the mother's narcissism and rivalry; (2) The symbolic for dialogues showing violations of family laws or rules; and (3) The real for moments of desire outbursts. Conclusions were drawn based on the dominance of these orders on the mother character's behavior.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of the movie's visual and verbal narrative reveals that the transgressions committed by the character Rina cannot be reduced to mere moral deviance. Through the lens of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, Rina's behavior manifests as a subject in crisis within the structure of *desire* stemming from a profound imbalance across the three psychic registers of *The Real*, *The Imaginary*, and *The Symbolic*. The following is an in-depth analysis based on the observed data.

Table 1. Chronological Classification of Scenes based on Lacanian Registers

| Sequence Time | Scene Description | Lacanian Register |
|-----------------|--|----------------------|
| 0:06:11 | The father returns home; interaction is limited to a cold hand-kiss followed by immediate spatial segregation into separate bedrooms. The father refuses to include Rina in a family outing. | Symbolic Dysfunction |
| 0:39:02 | Irfan offers to pick up Rina later ("I'll pick you up, <i>Ambu</i> "), showing special attention that the husband fails to provide. | Imaginary |
| 0:39:22 | Irfan praises Rina's hand (" <i>Ambu</i> 's hand smells nice"), initiating the narcissistic reconstruction of Rina's body image. | Imaginary |
| 0:40:01 | Rina smells her own hand after Irfan's praise, validating the external compliment internally. | Imaginary |
| 00:40:00 | (Motorbike Scene) Irfan asks Rina to hold on tight ("Pegangan yang kencang, <i>Ambu</i> "). Rina blushes at the physical contact. | Imaginary |
| 0:41:01 | Rina applies lipstick in front of the mirror and smiles at her reflection, identifying with an idealized self-image (The Mirror Stage). | Imaginary |
| 0:44:00 | Irfan praises Rina in public (" <i>Ambu</i> is glowing"), and Rina takes a selfie, seeking to capture this new idealized image. | Imaginary |
| 0:54:50 | Irfan explicitly calls Rina "Beautiful" (<i>Cantik</i>). Rina responds by touching Irfan's face, solidifying him as her desire object. | Imaginary |
| 1:06:00 | (Merged Scene) Rina inhales the scent of Irfan's shirt. The father walks past her with total indifference, ignoring her presence entirely. | Symbolic Dysfunction |
| 1:11:29 | The father refuses to say goodbye to Rina before leaving for Jakarta, choosing only to "send regards" via Norma. | Symbolic Dysfunction |
| 1:15:30 | Rina brings food to Irfan's room. She claims her body feels "hot" (<i>gerah</i>) and asks Irfan to turn on the AC, a metaphor for sexual desire. | The Real |
| 1:18:10 | (Key Event) Rina and Irfan engage in their first sexual transgression (incest), marking the collapse of the incest taboo. | The Real |
| 1:21:00 | Rina and Irfan are seen praying together (<i>sholat jamaah</i>). Rina kisses Irfan's hand, placing him in the symbolic position of "Husband". | Symbolic Distortion |
| 1:28:00 | Irfan gives Rina money. Rina refuses but Irfan insists ("It's for <i>Ambu</i> 's shopping"). Rina accepts, feeling provided for. | Imaginary |
| 1:31:00 | Rina gives Irfan a new motorbike using Norma's savings, sacrificing her daughter's resources for her lover. | Symbolic Violation |
| 1:45:48 | (Climax) Rina hysterically screams that her "youth was stolen" and claims she is still "17 years old," revealing the repressed trauma. | The Real |
| 1:49:14 | Residents raid Rina's shop and destroy her property, representing the violent intrusion of social law (The Big Other). | Symbolic Collapse |
| 1:53:32 | Rina uses a test pack and reveals she is pregnant with Irfan's child. | The Real |
| 1:58:04 | Norma catches Rina and Irfan together again. Rina physically blocks Norma to let Irfan escape. | Symbolic Reversal |
| 2:03:57 | In court, Rina refuses to admit guilt and accuses Norma of being an "ungrateful child" for imprisoning her mother. | Symbolic Reversal |
| 2:07:24 | Rina and Irfan are sentenced to prison. Norma visits, but Rina says, "You are not wrong, I am not wrong, only the situation is wrong." | Psychotic Refusal |

1. The Absence of *The Name-of-the-Father* and Domestic Segregation



Figure 1. The Symbolic Death of the Marital Relationship

Figure 1 shows two key sequences. The first sequence depicts Rina ironing clothes in the living room. In a moment of solitude, she is seen intimately inhaling the scent of Irfan's shirt. However, when the father arrives home, the atmosphere shifts, Rina ignores his presence and continues ironing, while the father walks past her without initiating any conversation. The second sequence illustrates the father's return from Jakarta. The reunion is marked by coldness, limited to a brief hand-kiss before Rina immediately retreats to her room, leaving the father to go to a separate bedroom located at the back of the house. This segregation is further emphasized when Norma attempts to invite Rina for a family outing. Rina refuses the offer, and the father promptly reinforces this exclusion by suggesting that he and Norma should go alone without Rina.

In the Lacanian perspective, the stability of the Symbolic order within a family relies heavily on an authority function that operates in tandem with affection. However, observation of the scene data indicates a fundamental and chronic dysfunction in Rina's household. The marital relationship is depicted as having undergone a "symbolic death" marked by extreme spatial segregation. Initial data reveals that upon the Father's return from Jakarta, physical interaction is limited to a stiff hand-kiss without dialogue which is immediately followed by physical separation. Rina retreats to her room while the Father sleeps in a completely different room located at the back of the house.

This behavior illustrates a structural failure in what Lacan terms the paternal function. As emphasized in recent Lacanian scholarship by Vanheule (2024), the "Name-of-the-Father" is not merely a biological person but a symbolic operator required to anchor the social link and separate the subject from maternal *jouissance*. In the movie, the Father fails to perform this anchoring role. This is evidenced by his total lack of attention in daily interactions. In the scene where Rina is present at home while holding Irfan's shirt and the Father walks by, he passes with cold indifference as he neither turns his head nor acknowledges his wife.

The peak of this alienation is recorded when the Father prepares to return to Jakarta for work. When Norma asks if he intends to say goodbye to his wife personally, the Father explicitly refuses the initiative and chooses instead to merely "send his regards" through Norma. Coupled with the Father's refusal to include Rina in a family outing by insisting that he and Norma go alone, these facts confirm that the Father has failed to present himself as *The Other* who provides validation. Consequently, the symbolic order collapses because the subject lacks a compass to navigate social laws without this operational signifier (Vanheule, 2024). This absence of recognition creates a gaping *Lack* within Rina's psyche which compels her to seek another signifier to patch her fractured ego.

2. Irfan as the Imaginary Mirror and Ego Reconstruction

When the Symbolic reality or marriage fails to provide satisfaction, the subject tends to regress to the Imaginary phase to reconstruct a cohesive self-image. Irfan enters this dynamic not merely as a sexual object but as a "mirror" reflecting the ideal image Rina craves.

This dynamic is clearly visible when Irfan praises the scent of Rina's hand by saying "Ambu's hand smells nice" and Rina responds by smelling her own hand. The pinnacle of this Imaginary phase is captured in the scene before the mirror where Rina applies the lipstick gifted by Irfan. This moment perfectly enacts Lacan's concept of the Mirror Stage. According to Neill (2023), this stage is crucial because the subject identifies with an external image or *imago* to construct a sense of unitary self which masks the reality of their fragmented body.

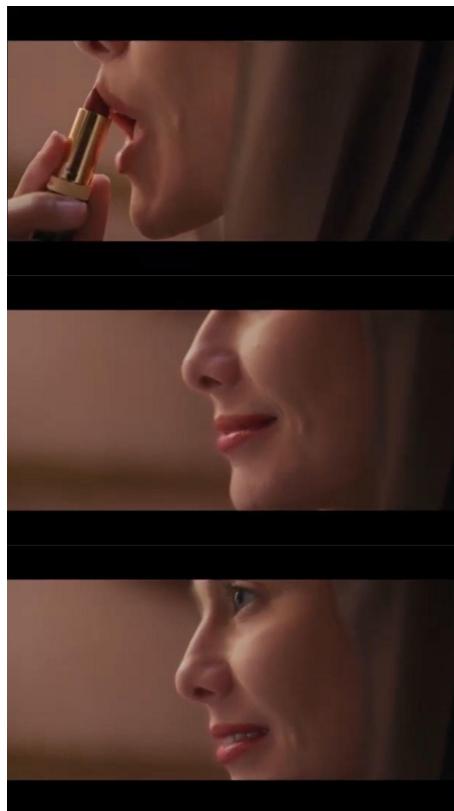


Figure 2. The Reconstruction of the Ego through the Mirror Stage

Figure 2 shows the moment Rina returns to the privacy of her room and unpacks the lipstick given by Irfan. She proceeds to apply the lipstick while facing the mirror, carefully observing her own image. The scene concludes with Rina gazing at her reflection and smiling with a distinct sense of satisfaction, capturing her engagement with the new appearance.

Rina's smile at her own reflection represents this specific illusion of wholeness. She engages in what Neill (2023) describes as the inevitable *méconnaissance* or misrecognition of the ego where she no longer sees herself as an aging or neglected mother-in-law but as a "beautiful" and desired woman. Here, Irfan functions as a prosthetic aid for Rina's ego and allows her to deny the reality of aging and spousal neglect.

3. *The Return of the Repressed: Reclaiming Lost Youth*

Data analysis uncovers that Rina's deepest motive transcends biological desire. The courtroom scene serves as *key data* because it unveils the trauma of *The Real* that had been repressed. Rina's hysterical outburst declaring that she has been imprisoned for 20 years and is still 17 years old because her youth was taken away is explicit evidence of the *return of the repressed*.

In psychoanalytic theory, repression does not eliminate a drive but merely relegates it to the unconscious where it insists on returning. This statement shifts the analytical perspective because Rina's infidelity acts as a desperate attempt to turn back time. She projects her 17-year-old self onto her interaction with Irfan. Consequently, Irfan acts as a fantasy bridge for Rina to reclaim the youth she feels was stolen by early marriage and two decades of domestic confinement. Rina refuses to acknowledge symbolic castration or the limitations of age and chooses instead to remain trapped in an intoxicating fantasy.

4. The Collapse of the Symbolic and the Reversal of Legal Logic

The fatal consequence of *jouissance* or desire that transgresses the law ultimately drags Rina before criminal justice. The raid by residents and the destruction of her noodle shop mark the initial collapse of Rina's social mask in the face of the *Big Other* or society. However, Rina's psychic response during the criminal trial demonstrates a total rejection of Symbolic Reality.

In court, Rina shows no guilt for her actions. Instead, she unleashes her anger upon Norma by accusing her of being an "ungrateful child" (*anak durhaka*) for imprisoning her own mother. In Lacanian terms, this is Rina's attempt to reverse the logic of the law. She refuses to be positioned as the criminal who violated moral norms and attempts to shift the narrative to portray Norma as the one violating the "Law of the Mother" or filial piety. Rina hides behind her biological status as a mother to obscure her moral collapse. This attitude indicates a failure of social integration because she prefers to deny legal reality to protect her wounded ego even though she has destroyed the very structure of the family itself.

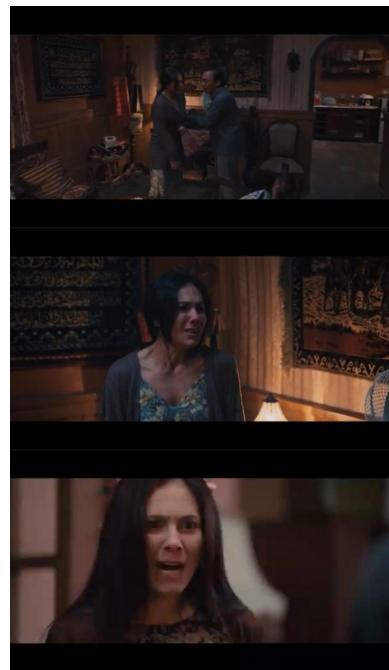


Figure 3. The Return of the Repressed and Rejection of the Symbolic

Figure 3 shows the intense confrontation that occurs after Rina and Irfan are caught engaging in an illicit act. Instead of showing remorse for the transgression, Rina is depicted verbally attacking both the father and Norma, directing her anger at them in a defensive outburst immediately following the discovery.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, this study concludes that the behavior of the character Rina in the movie "Norma" represents the tragedy of a Lacanian subject who fails to negotiate desire within a dysfunctional family order. The infidelity that occurs is not a standalone anomaly but the culmination of an existential crisis triggered by the death of the paternal function or *The Name-of-the-Father* within the household. This is evidenced by physical segregation and active avoidance which create a profound *Lack* within the subject.

Rina utilizes Irfan as a fantasy object to reconstruct the Imaginary phase in an attempt to unify her fragmented identity and reclaim the youth lost to past trauma. The movie critically illustrates the collapse of the social order when individual *jouissance* clashes with moral law. Ultimately, Rina becomes an alienated subject because she not only loses her position in society but also denies legal reality by taking refuge behind her motherhood which marks a total failure to confront the consequences of her actions.

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