



Women's Resilience in the Main Character of the Novel *Hanauzumi*

Fakhria Nesa*, Literature and Culture Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Andalas

Andina Meutia Hawa, Literature and Culture Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Andalas

ABSTRACT

This study examines women's resilience through the main character in *Hanauzumi*, a novel by Watanabe Jun'ichi. Employing a narrative approach and feminist literary criticism, the research explores the factors that shape resilience, the forms of resilience displayed by the female protagonist, Ogino Ginko, and the outcomes achieved. The findings reveal that both internal factors, such as trauma and illness, and external factors, including social pressures and societal expectations, shape Ginko's resilience. In confronting these conditions, Ginko demonstrates strength through transformations in her appearance and her courage in facing social rejection. Ultimately, she succeeds in fulfilling her aspiration to become a female physician. The character Ogino Ginko in the novel *Hanauzumi* represents a resilient woman who can confront and overcome both internal pressures, such as trauma and illness, and external pressures in the form of social expectations and gender-based discrimination. The forms of resilience she demonstrates include symbolic identity transformation and the mental fortitude to persevere. Her ultimate achievement as a female physician signifies Ginko's success in breaking through gender boundaries and proving that women are capable of determining their own life paths. This study highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics of women's resilience in literary texts as a reflection of their existential struggle against patriarchal cultural dominance.

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*CORRESPONDENCE AUTHOR

 fakhrianesa@hum.unand.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Literature, as a cultural product, not only represents the dynamics of human life but also portrays women as subjects who confront a range of social, psychological, and cultural pressures. In many works, female characters are depicted in situations that require them to endure and adapt to social structures that often do not favor them. Such representations suggest that the pressures faced by women in literary texts are not merely sources of suffering but also spaces for the emergence of resilience. In line with Humm's (1990) view, the construction of women in literature is often connected to the gender ideologies operating within society, suggesting that women's ability to persist can be read as a form of resistance against patriarchal norms. In this context, literature serves as an essential medium through which women's resilience is expressed through their actions, choices, and survival strategies represented in the narrative.

From the perspective of feminist literary criticism, female characters are not merely understood as narrative figures but also as subjects who negotiate cultural pressures through a complex process of identity formation. The presence of resilience becomes significant because it demonstrates how women manage,



overcome, and even transform traumatic or oppressive experiences into new forms of strength. According to Gilligan (1982), women's experiences are often shaped by relationships and empathy, which can become the foundation for resilience in the face of structural obstacles. Meanwhile, Ungar (2011) emphasizes that resilience is not only an individual capacity but also the result of interactions between individuals and their sociocultural environments. Therefore, when a text depicts women striving to maintain their autonomy despite pressures, the literary work becomes a representational space that affirms resilience as an integral part of female subjectivity. This illustrates that literature not only reveals gender inequalities but also offers insight into women's internal strengths and adaptive capacities in the face of harsh realities. This conceptual framework provides the foundation for selecting *Hanauzumi* as the object of the present study, as the novel explicitly foregrounds women's lived experiences in confronting interconnected social, psychological, and cultural pressures.

The representation of women in the novel *Hanauzumi* illustrates how its characters confront social, psychological, and cultural pressures that align with general portrayals of women found in literature. The female characters in this novel are depicted within social spaces filled with demands—from family, society, and interpersonal relationships—that shape how they perceive themselves and influence their decisions. Such conditions demonstrate that *Hanauzumi* does not merely position women as objects of suffering, but as subjects capable of negotiating their roles within restrictive social structures. Thus, the novel becomes a concrete reflection of how women in literature navigate identity struggles and confront multidimensional pressures as described in feminist theory.

Furthermore, *Hanauzumi* serves as a clear example of how the concept of women's resilience is manifested in literary texts. The female characters not only experience emotional and social pressures but also attempt to develop adaptive strategies to maintain their subjectivity and survival. Referring to Ungar's (2011) concept that resilience is a process of interaction between individuals and their environments, the journeys of the women in *Hanauzumi* reveal how social support, past experiences, and reflective capacity shape their ability to endure painful experiences. Likewise, consistent with Gilligan's (1982) emphasis on relational perspectives among women, resilience in *Hanauzumi* often emerges through both supportive and painful relationships that compel the characters to revise their self-understanding and discover new strengths. Thus, the novel not only portrays women's suffering but also articulates how resilience becomes an integral component of women's identity formation within the cultural context of Japan.

Marlia (in Pratiwi, 2016) states that many women can continue living despite encountering severe challenges. The capacity to endure this hardship is known as resilience. Resilience becomes a crucial factor that enables women to persevere and rise from difficult situations. Meanwhile, according to Schoon (2006), resilience is a dynamic, adaptive process through which individuals confront life difficulties stemming from social, economic, physical, or traumatic backgrounds.

Hanauzumi presents a portrait of women facing emotional and social burdens of considerable complexity. Its main character, Ogino Ginko, symbolizes a woman who rises from wounds and societal stigma. This study aims to reveal how Ginko's resilience is constructed and expressed within the narrative, and how her ultimate achievement represents a victory for women over patriarchal culture. This research examines the strength of the female protagonist in *Hanauzumi* through a narrative approach, focusing on the background of her resilience, the forms of resilience she demonstrates, and the outcomes of that resilience. The study offers a deeper understanding of women's experiences marked by struggle and articulates the strength and recovery capacity of women in confronting the harsh realities of life.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the representation of female characters in *Hanauzumi* by examining the various forms of social, psychological, and cultural pressures that shape gender constructions within the narrative. Through this analysis, the study also aims to explore how women's resilience is expressed through the survival strategies, adaptive behaviors, and negotiations employed by the characters as they confront oppression and unequal relationships. Additionally, the research aims to explain the interconnectedness between the representation of women and the concept of resilience by employing insights from feminist theory and resilience theory to understand the processes of forming and negotiating female subjectivity in the cultural context of Japan. Overall, this study aims to demonstrate how *Hanauzumi* serves as a space for articulating women's experiences that reflect the complexity of identity, power relations, and emotional endurance, which continuously evolve within social life.

This research employs two primary approaches—feminist literary criticism and narrative analysis—to explore the representation of women and the dynamics of resilience in *Hanauzumi*. First, feminist literary criticism is applied to examine how female characters are represented in the text, especially in relation to male dominance and the patriarchal social structures that shape women's experiences and positions. Wiyatmi (2012) states that feminist literary criticism attempts to “uncover cultural constructions that position women as marginalized within social relations” and to analyze how literary works may present forms of resistance to such structures. This perspective enables the researcher to interpret women's experiences in the novel not merely as narrative events but as components of an ideological construction that illustrates power relations and gender inequality. Thus, the feminist approach provides a framework for understanding how social, psychological, and cultural pressures within the literary work relate directly to the process of shaping women's resilience. Second, this research employs a narrative approach to examine how story structure, narrative techniques, and character construction contribute to the construction of meaning regarding women's experiences.

Bal (1997) asserts that narrative analysis is essential because “narrative structure determines how readers understand events, time, and relationships among characters,” implying that meaning lies not only in the content of the story but also in how the story is constructed. Through this approach, the researcher can observe how the narrator, plot, point of view, and characterization of women in *Hanauzumi* contribute to shaping representations of their struggles and resilience. By integrating narrative and feminist approaches, this study highlights the relationship between the representation of women and the strategies of resilience that emerge through language, narrative structure, and other narrative configurations within the novel. To date, no scholarly studies have been identified that specifically examine the resilience of the character Ginko in the novel *Hanauzumi* through the lens of Mieke Bal's narrative analysis. Existing research has instead focused on related issues, such as the power of memory, the concept of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother), and the dominance of patriarchal structures shaping Ginko's experiences.

The first study, entitled *Memory and the Impossibility of Forgiveness in Jun'ichi Watanabe's Hanauzumi*, by Intannia Cahyasari (2017), employs Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory and Michel Foucault's theory of power/knowledge. The study reveals that the formation of Ginko's Memory is shaped by multiple forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, gender-based oppression, limited access to education, and the deprivation of political rights imposed upon her. The discourse through which Ginko represents practices of power is articulated from her perspectives as both a physician and a woman. The transmission of knowledge and experience is understood as a reaction to Ginko's past, positioning her as a post-generational subject. The subsequent study, entitled *The Concept of ryōsai kenbo in the Character of Kayo in Jun'ichi Watanabe's Hanauzumi*, by Isma'il Hassan (2015), applies the concept of *ryōsai kenbo*, which

denotes the ideal of a “good wife and wise mother.” This concept is embodied in the character of Kayo, who is portrayed as the wife of Ayasaburō and the mother of the novel’s protagonist, Ginko. The analysis focuses on how Kayo’s role reflects the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal within the narrative of *Hanauzumi*. Another study that examines *Hanauzumi* from a feminist perspective is Patriarchal Domination over the Female Character Ginko in Jun’ichi Watanabe’s *Hanauzumi*, by Tesa Mitalika (2014). This research employs the framework of the patriarchal system, i.e., the (家) family system, Confucian ideology as articulated in Onna Daigaku, and samurai culture (feudalism). The analysis demonstrates the pervasive dominance of patriarchy over Ginko across various aspects of her life. The findings indicate that gender injustice and the oppression of women in Japan are rooted in early Meiji-era social conditions, which were still heavily grounded in patriarchal structures, the ie system, Confucian ideology as promoted in Onna Daigaku, and samurai feudal culture. These conditions positioned women in subordinate and compliant roles under male domination.

A fundamental distinction between this study and previous research on the novel *Hanauzumi* lies in the absence of analyses that specifically and comprehensively position the character Ginko as a subject of resilience. Ginko is not only portrayed as a character who experiences trauma, oppression, and structural injustice, but also as one who develops the capacity to endure, recover, and transform suffering into personal and social strength. Therefore, a study focusing on Ginko’s resilience is crucial to complement existing scholarship by highlighting both internal processes (psychological development and identity formation) and external processes (education, professional engagement, and social relationships) that enable Ginko to transcend patriarchal constraints and construct a new position as a woman and a physician within Japanese society.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, which focuses on describing phenomena, meanings, and processes that emerge in literary texts in a detailed and in-depth manner. According to Moleong (2019), qualitative research aims to “understand phenomena experienced by subjects holistically by describing them in words and language within a specific natural context.” Thus, this method enables the researcher to elaborate on the representation of women and the forms of resilience that appear in the novel *Hanauzumi* both textually and contextually.

In literary studies, the qualitative descriptive approach is used to read and interpret texts by considering the signs, symbols, and narrative constructions that shape them. Ratna (2015) explains that qualitative research in literature emphasizes “a deep understanding of the construction of meaning that arises through the interaction between the text and the socio-cultural context that underlies it.” Therefore, the analysis in this research not only describes the narrative structure and female characters in the novel but also relates them to broader social realities, particularly those concerning patriarchy, power relations, and women’s psychological dynamics.

Data collection was conducted through a close reading of the novel *Hanauzumi*, analyzing narrative sections that depict the social, psychological, and cultural pressures experienced by the female characters. The data were then analyzed in reference to feminist literary criticism and narrative theory, as outlined in the theoretical framework. Creswell (2014) states that qualitative analysis involves organizing data, coding, grouping themes, and interpreting meanings based on theoretical frameworks. These steps allow the researcher to identify patterns of gender representation, resilience strategies, and narrative constructions that shape the meaning of the story.

Thus, the qualitative descriptive method in this study aims not only to describe narrative phenomena but also to interpret the meanings embedded in women's experiences as represented in *Hanauzumi* and to connect them with broader social and cultural realities. Below is a polished, academic-quality English translation of your Analysis section. The tone has been adjusted to meet scholarly standards while preserving the original text's meaning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Factors Contributing to Resilience

The factors contributing to Ginkgo's resilience consist of internal factors originating within herself and external factors arising from the social environment in which she lives. The following excerpt illustrates the internal factors that shape Ginkgo's resilience:

いかに下の病といっても、そんな風に一概に断定できるものだろうか。体を壊されたうえ、私わの一人前の女ではなくなったのか、考えるうちにぎんの頭は憤りで熱くなった (Watanabe, 2013: 40).

This passage can be interpreted as follows: *"No matter how shameful the illness is, can such a judgment really be made so arbitrarily? Has she ceased to be a proper woman because of an illness in her body? As Ginko thought about this, her head grew hot with anger."* Ginko experiences trauma caused by a venereal disease that makes her feel incomplete as a woman. She becomes furious at the notion that her illness renders her "no longer a real woman." This moment reveals a profound crisis of identity and self-worth, yet it also marks the beginning of her resilience.

The narrative captures a pivotal moment in which Ginko confronts an internal struggle triggered by an illness that threatens not only her physical well-being but also her identity as a woman. Ginko questions and ultimately rejects the deterministic societal view that ties a woman's worth to her bodily purity. This inner conflict signifies the emergence of internal resilience: the ability to reinterpret suffering through cognitive and emotional reflection. Her "anger that heats the mind" is not presented merely as an emotional outburst, but as a catalyst for self-awareness and inner strength that compels her to resist the degrading social norms imposed upon her. Thus, the passage demonstrates that Ginko's resilience is grounded in her internal capacity for self-evaluation, self-preservation, and refusal to accept definitions that undermine her existence.

Beyond her psychological struggle, various forms of mistreatment and social pressure from those around her function as external factors that further shape her resilience. The following excerpt reveals verbal opposition toward Ginko's aspirations.

そなたが東東へ出て学問をし、女医者なるのだ、などということが村の人々に聞えたら何と嗤われます。あの気狂い女がと皆に後ろ指をさされます。もう今度こそ誰にも相手にされず村に度と戻ること出来なくなるのですよ (Watanabe, 2013: 93).

This statement from Ginko's mother, Kayo, may be translated as: *"If the people in the village hear that you are going to Tokyo to study and become a female doctor, they will laugh at you. Everyone will point fingers and call you a crazy woman. Once you leave, you will never be accepted again, nor will you be able to return to this village."* Kayo's words reflect intense social pressure expressed through threats of stigma and communal rejection. This reveals how patriarchal norms operate as mechanisms of social control that restrict

women's mobility and aspirations. These external pressures serve as obstacles to Ginko's ambition, yet they also become catalysts that strengthen her determination. Social pressure manifested through ridicule, stigma, and the threat of ostracism can reinforce resilience when the individual interprets such hostility as a challenge rather than a deterrent. Despite being warned that she may face permanent exclusion, Ginko refuses to be restrained. Instead, she cultivates a stronger resolve to prove her capability beyond the cultural constraints imposed upon her.

Patriarchal oppression often reinforces women's resilience when they refuse to submit. Ginko's insistence on pursuing medical education despite being labeled a "madwoman" reconfigures these cultural barriers into opportunities for asserting identity and agency. Additionally, the lack of social support compels Ginko to seek alternative environments that offer better prospects, such as the urban sphere, where she can pursue her studies. Thus, social rejection becomes not only a pressure but also a driving force behind her upward mobility.

2. Form of Resilience

Ginko's resilience in pursuing her life goals manifests in two primary forms. The first is self-transformation, in which she shifts from a feminine appearance to a more masculine one. The second is mental fortitude in facing verbal hostility from men.

Self-Transformation

服装は着流しを改め、海老茶の袴を着け素足に日和下駄という男と変らぬ身装にした。もちろん、白粉や紅は一切つけず襟元は極端にひつつめ、袖口も思いきり狭くすぼめてしまった。できるだけ男達の恰好に近づけ、女らしい感じを消そうというわけである (Watanabe, 2013: 174).

The passage may be translated as: "Ginko changed her clothing, wearing dark-red hakama and wooden geta on her bare feet—the same attire as men. She, of course, used no powder or lipstick, tied her collar tightly, and narrowed her sleeves as much as possible. She tried to resemble men as closely as she could, erasing all traces of femininity." Ginko consciously removes feminine attributes, cosmetics, hairstyles, and women's clothing, choosing instead an appearance associated with men. This transformation is not merely a style alteration, but a strategic adaptation to overcome the gender barriers that limit her mobility in a male-dominated environment.

By modifying her appearance, Ginko aims to reduce social stigma and secure a neutral space in which she can study medicine. Resilience often emerges through an individual's ability to modify performative identity to navigate oppressive circumstances without abandoning core goals. Her transformation symbolizes resistance to normative gender expectations that confine women to domestic roles. Wearing male attire becomes a performative act of rejecting discriminatory norms and reconfiguring her access to public and professional spaces.

Rather than stemming from shame, Ginko's transformation is a tactical maneuver to avoid discrimination and maintain her pursuit of becoming a physician. This demonstrates her courage, flexibility, and goal-oriented determination—hallmarks of internal resilience. In Meiji-era Japan, where female entry into professional realms was heavily stigmatized, adopting masculine attire allowed Ginko to negotiate her place within a restrictive social structure.

Mental Fortitude

揶揄とも侮辱ともつかない言葉を次々と浴びせる。吟子は油断なく身構えたまま廊下につっ立っていた。逃げ出すことは簡単だ。だが今逃げ帰ったのでは、これまでの努力が無駄になってしまう (Watanabe, 2013: 172).

Translated, the excerpt reads: “Mockery and insults rained down on Ginko one after another. She stood firm in the corridor, remaining alert. Escaping would be easy. But if she ran away now, all her efforts thus far would be wasted.” Ginkgo endures persistent verbal assaults intended to intimidate and discourage her presence in an educational and professional setting dominated by men. Such attacks aim not only to shame but also to weaken her resolve. Nonetheless, Ginkgo remains steadfast. She prepares herself mentally, refusing to succumb to fear or humiliation. Her stance, upright, unwavering, and alert, signals strong mental resilience.

She has the option to flee, and doing so would be a natural emotional response. However, she chooses not to be aware that giving up would invalidate the long struggle she has undertaken. This long-term goal orientation is central to resilience, reflecting a belief that personal agency matters more than external pressures. Her silent endurance serves as a form of resistance against patriarchal dominance. Without retaliating, her firm posture asserts that she will not submit to intimidation or accept her marginalization.

3. Post-Resilience Achievements

Ginkgo’s achievements after undergoing cycles of resilience are reflected in the following passage.

とやかく言っても吟子は女医者なのだ。容色や若さを越えてなお大きな自負が今の吟子にはあった (Watanabe, 2013: 333).

This quotation can be translated as: “Whatever people may say, Ginkgo is a female doctor. Beyond beauty or youth, she now possesses a profound sense of pride within herself.” This narrative depicts Ginko at a stage where she not only recovers from adversity but also attains significant personal growth and accomplishment.

Her status as a female doctor represents a new identity forged through perseverance and transformation. This identity is not socially granted; it is earned through resilience. The “pride” mentioned here is not arrogance but a form of self-recognition—a testament to her battles against illness, gender discrimination, community ridicule, institutional rejection, and legal restrictions on women. This pride marks a victory over structural barriers intended to limit her potential. By becoming one of Japan’s first female physicians, Ginko disrupts gender norms and redefines what women can achieve in public professional life. Her accomplishment exemplifies post-resilience growth: individuals who overcome profound hardship do not simply return to their former state; they emerge stronger, more capable, and more meaningful in their contributions to society.

CONCLUSIONS

The character Ogino Ginko in the novel *Hanauzumi* represents a resilient woman who can confront and overcome both internal pressures, such as trauma and illness, and external pressures in the form of social expectations and gender-based discrimination. The forms of resilience she demonstrates include symbolic identity transformation and the mental fortitude to persevere. Her ultimate achievement as a female physician signifies Ginko’s success in breaking through gender boundaries and proving that women are capable of determining their own life paths.

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