

WOMEN POWER TO END THE OPPRESSIONS OF PATRIARCHY IN SUSAN GLASPELL'S PLAY 'TRIFLES'

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ABSTRACT

In patriarchy society, women do not have other choice but obey all rules set by men. As a result, women's life marginalized and gap between women's role and men's occurred. The same condition and situation faced by a woman, as the main character, in Susan Glaspell's entitled 'Trifles'. This paper would like to identify the patriarchy oppressions and analyze action as the reflection of women's power to end the oppressions of patriarchy. The women power, subtle and indirect, that may the women themselves never realize they have it

Key words: patriarchy, oppressions, women's power

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy places women all over the world to the most inconvenient conditions; all of which impede them to grow both physically and psychologically. Variety of roles and tasks are attached to women and force them to act accordingly. This condition sets a trap for women's existentialism since they cannot really move or even do a trivial movement. As a result, women only have a small room to 'breathe'.

As members of society, women have the same achievements with men do. However, women cannot live their lives to the fullest due to the obstacles on their path of life, which strict women's steps.

The attached roles and duties create the different identity of women and men. At this stage, literature holds the important feature to actively construct and/or change any society's construction. Just like the construction of women's roles which can

only be illuminated at the same time by literature. Literature is the only media connecting writers and readers as to send any message because there is not any way out from patriarchy, so we can not rely on society. (Darma, 1999: 4)

Understanding their condition, women write various literature dealing with problems caused by patriarchy's pressures. At the same time, they also create the possible resolution. Those literature, then, offer the answer of that subtle conflicts caused by patriarchy oppressions.

Literature records all the gap due to patriarchy oppressions. All of which, at the same time, empower and strengthen women's power to stand against conflicts. As a matter of fact, Susan Glaspell's play entitled "Trifles" also talked about an oppressed woman, Mrs. Minnie Wright as the main character. She experienced all of

the worst condition in her marriage. In fact, 'Trifles' is a controversial play ever in America which put the writer, Susan Glaspell, to the international writer's level.

However, those problems turned out to be the power for Mrs. Wright to speak aloud and to be the best she could. This women power underlines the strong personality of women to find the way out of patriarchy oppressions.

This paper will analyze the results of patriarchy's oppressions. The first is a description about marginalized aspects in women's life which is represented by Mrs. Minnie Wright in Susan Glaspell's play 'Trifles'. The second result of patriarchy oppression is gap role of women will be compared to men in Susan Glaspell's work as to underline the imbalance 'duties' between men and women. The last discussion is that the woman main character loses the tightened gender chain in Glaspell' work. In other words, this paper will give the detail description of women and their marginalized aspects of life which affects the gap of role application between men and women. At last, women's attempts is to end the oppression of patriarchy due to women's power in Glaspell's play 'Trifles'.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Play, as one of literature genres, has a close relation to fiction, poetry, and essay. Play focusses on conversation and detail description on stage with the absence of the playwright (Diyanni, 1994: 755).

Sharing the same opinion, Ibnu explore the basic aspects of drama namely the conversation between characters, and the comprehensive description about mood, setting, or actions of each characters as shown on the stage guidance. (Budianta, 2003: 95) According to both statements above, Susan Glaspell's work entitled 'Trifles' can be included into play since readers can find utterances between characters as the main 'clue' to comprehend its meaning and to analyse its detail hidden meaning as well.

As a matter of fact, play has several types. Some of them are sad, the others are funny stories, and the rests are the combination of both types. The first two types of drama are tragedy and comedy which contrast the idea of suffering and happiness. The detail description runs as follows.

Tragedy Play

According to Aristotle, tragedy play is the imitation of serious and comprehensive attitudes (DiYanni, 1994: 777). It is closely related to human's attitudes and all of their consequences. It has the beginning, middle, and end part of story. All events are related to one another because of causal logical relationship in order to create certain story. One part of the play cause the inevitable catharsis which is indicated by the 'fall' of a main character. As an example, the main character died due to a trivial reason.

Comedy Play

Some tragic elements of tragedy play can also be found in comedy play. New findings or a new construction, for example, can be identified in both types of the play, also wrong perception and missed judgement as the reflection of human's weaknesses and failure. However, they do not cause the happening of 'disaster' just like in tragedy play, but the happiness of comedian. Characteristics in comedy play can always be easily guessed. On the contrary, their plot are unpredictable because of surprises at the end of the play.

Tragicomedy Play

Many modern drama is the combination form between comedy and tragedy, the blend of human emotional basic. It is not necessary to classify whether one play is dominated by either tragedy or comedy. Even some playwright said that tragicomedy was the right form of presenting the complex illogical world. It will never be the same if the theme is presented with tragedy or comedy play.

Melodrama

It is originated from opera in which characters have the conversation with music as the background. It can also be about any performance which build the emotion of viewers with music only because they will never listen to any conversation.

Farce

It is one of drama types with cartoon characteristics. It is a comedy play with much laughter as the result of any attitudes and or utterances spoken by characters in the play. Nowadays, it is similar to situational comedy that we can watch on television.

Susan Glaspell's play 'Trifles' which was written in 1916 is tragedy drama. It offered the emotional sufferings felt by Mrs. Minnie Wright as the result of her husband's psychological abuse. Those miseries were revealed by the time people knew that Mr. Wright was murdered in his own house. Mrs. Wright's ignorance of her husband's death lead to accusation of her involvement in that murder.

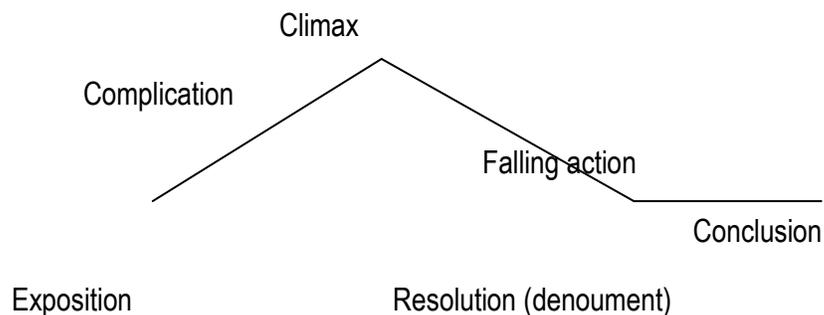
Some playwrights use a dramatic means of conveying the play's theme such as monologue, soliloquy, and aside in order to be more easily understood by the play's readers or audience. Monologue is either a written or spoken composition of one character's discourse. One character usually explains everything that already happened. Meanwhile, soliloquy is like monologue since one character speaks up on the stage. He usually conveys his subjective thought to viewers to suggest things which will happen next time in the play. Aside is also about an utterance to viewers. The utterance about the thoughts of certain character is eavesdropped by another character. Usually the thoughts are about the comments about certain events which are going on. On the stage, the

character who uttered aside will either look at or look another side of viewers and stand by the side of the stage.

Tong (1998) asserted eight comprehensive thoughts about feminism which become the framework of thinking. The first is liberal feminism. Betty Friedan stated that the role of being a wife and mother are not satisfying, so modern women need to have something to do in public sphere which is more meaningful than merely cleaning the house and taking care of children. It is because marriage and motherhood are a part and not the whole life of women. It is as important for men to improve their personal life, and as women to improve their public and social life. If women are allowed to earn a living, it means that men will be free, too because they will not be the only person who is responsible for the economy of family.

METHODOLOGY

Analysis started at the basic unit of play or so-called scene. 'Trifles' has tighter plot because it consists of one scene only (Satoto, 1986: 88). Play usually related to dramatic plot or what so-called structure or pattern. The beginning of pattern introduces characters and setting, then followed by the finding of the first trifle thing in 'Trifles'. Series of complications lead to a climax or a turning point. Women characters' decision to hide their opinion about the motif of Mr. Wright's murder indicates the falling action. All of which answer problems arisen in the Glaspell's drama and or conclusion that doing something that seemingly trifles are women's strength. (Doren, 1968: 488) Those stages of structure are drawn by Gustave Freytag (Satoto, 1968: 111-112):



The writer of drama, in this case Susan Glaspell, does not tell directly the main character's characteristics, but describing (1) character's name, (2) physical appearance, the way of dressing up, attitudes, reaction between one character towards another, (3)

dialogue or monologue conversation (Satoto, 1986: 98). In fact, Susan Glaspell does not really portray her main character physically. In other words, Glaspell's woman character does not exist, her presence is represented by voices of other characters and her belongings.

Thus, variety of interpretation towards her does not happen.

Analyzing play goes through some steps namely setting and time of happening, attitudes of characters and their conversation. All elements are observed in detail. Then, all related things will be connected to one another until they make up a certain pattern which shares the comprehensive meaning. The constructed pattern is the result of detail observation of the researcher. Third step is the obvious relation in Glaspell's play 'Trifles' that will be eventually sharpened by writing down any inferences which are in line with what is going on in the real world, so the conclusion based on the story can be reached. (Di Yanni, 1994: 762)

Before doing the analysis, the first thing done was collecting all information about women's roles especially found in Susan Glaspell's drama 'Trifles'. The needed information is the description in the drama written by Susan Glaspell which is followed by either implicit or explicit judgement about characters' attitude, or conclusion without any judgement, characters' physical appearances, and their way of dressing up in drama 'Trifles', their attitudes, how they communicate to one another including diction, thought, feeling and intention.

All collected data, then, was sorted out based on sex. Right after that they were classified into categories of marginalized aspects of life and gap of role as the result of patriarchy oppressions and women's action which ended the patriarchy oppressions.

FINDINGS IN SUSAN GLASPELL'S PLAY 'TRIFLES'

Patriarchy's Oppressions in Glaspell's Play 'Trifles'

Patriarchy society sets rules in tradition and culture which must be obeyed by women (Darma, 2002: 2). Those rules, made by men as the 'ruler' in patriarchy society, cause oppressions for women as the second member of society. Men do this to preserve their power against women. As a result, automatically women have lower position than men. The oppressions felt by women are also reflected in Susan Glaspell's drama entitled 'Trifles' and are represented by Mrs. Minnie Wright. The result of patriarchy oppressions are discussed in the following paragraph.

Marginalized Life of Women

Mrs. Minnie Wright is the main character in Susan Glaspell's drama entitled 'Trifles'. She lived under pressures because of rules made by her husband. When men set any rules, they put women to the lower position at the same time. In other words, men are the first and automatically women are the second citizen in patriarchy society. It means that women have to obey all rules which exclusively design to restrict women's life and impede them to grow psychologically. It surely abuses women psychological life and also locks women's self-actualization.

The same condition occurred to Mrs. Wright who did not have any other choice but agree to her husband's rule. As a

matter of fact, Mr. Wright did not have anybody to talk to since they lived in such a remote area. The worst part was that there was not any media of communication in their house as Mr. Wright refused to have one. Obeying her husband was the sign that Mrs. Minnie Wright's social life was ignored. Her social life of getting along with people was not taken into account by patriarchy. In other words, patriarchy underestimated women's social need to communicate with others.

Mrs. Minnie Foster's loneliness reached its peak when she was forbidden talking to her friends using the telephone. Her social life, suddenly, was taken away by patriarchy society with her husband as its agent.

"...if John wanted to put in a telephone, ... she started to laugh"
(Glaspell, 481)

As a matter of fact, Mr. Wright did such a serious crime due to breaking human's right of getting in touch with other people. The worst part happened since Mr. Wright did not ask his wife's opinion before doing anything such as living in a remote area or not having telephone in their house. It is another way of saying that women's ideas were not as important as men's. Thus, men left women behind.

"... it's a lonesome place ... a gloomy kitchen ..."
(Glaspell, 479, 485)

The life of Mrs. Minnie Wright was taken away slowly by her own husband. Irony occurred here because as a married woman, Mrs. Minnie

dreamt of having better quality of life compared to her single period. In fact, her marriage turned her life into dark and lonely life ever. The source of changing life of Mrs. Minnie Wright was her loving husband. As the representative of patriarchy society, Mrs. Wright's husband set such a lonely condition. Thus, it is well understood at the time Mr. and Mrs. Foster live in such a remote area. Not only that, each part of her home also indicated such an unhappy situation.

"... she used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster" (Glaspell, 483)"

Minnie Foster was described as a rich woman when she was a single. This empowered her to take an active part in any part of her life. She lived her life to the fullest. All of which, then, turned over to the opposing condition at the time she was married to Mr. Wright. Being a wife, Mrs. Minnie Wright's life was like in the cage because she never put on qualified clothes like she used to do. Not only that, Mrs. Minnie Wright was simply away from any worldly activities. It happened since her husband, Mr. Wright, forbade her to actively take part in any social life. All of those restrictions set by Mr. Wright were successful to bury all Mrs. Minnie Wright's capabilities and dreams as well. This situation changed Mrs. Minnie Wright's personalities to be sad and gloomy.

Gap of Role

Preserving the power of ruling, men have been dominating social and cultural aspects and

various tradition by being different from women (Darma, 2000: 1). The difference of women and men's tasks are leading to discrimination which restricts women's activities. Those different tasks are introduced at the very early of children life.

At the very beginning of children's life, they get their early education at their own house. Girls will always be nurtured differently from boys. Girls will always have different playing toys and associated to certain color which are totally different from boys'. Baby girls or teens are always bought pink things, while boys are accustomed by blue color. Toys like cooking set and other household toys belong to girls while guns or other similar games are associated to boys. Not only girls have specific toys, but they are also raised differently from boys. Ironically mothers, as the victim of patriarchy, are the ones who preserve patriarchy's rules by raising their children based on stereotypes. For instance, girls are allowed to cry while boys are forbidden due to absurd reason. It means that patriarchy is successful since women tend to subconsciously absorb the patriarchy's rules. As a result, they act accordingly and pass on to their future generation by teaching patriarchy rules at home's early education.

There is a clear-cut distinction between women and men's role which separate one responsibilities from another. Women are associated with households works, whereas men actively take part in public sphere. In other words, house and children, including education and raising children and all households works, are the responsibilities of women only. Thus, women or working mothers have double

responsibilities in earning money and raising their children. As a result, they will be accused if something wrong happened with their children or their house. On the contrary, there is not any detail information that we can find in Susan Glaspell's drama entitled 'Trifles' since Western women and men already live in equity. Though we can still find the different roles of men compared to women which public sphere was possessed by men still.

“...and Wright ought to work all day, and no company when he did come in” (Glaspell, 485)

Men will always dominate the public sphere (out of house), and women take care of house, so women can give the best service to their husbands and they can earn more money. (Djajanegara, 2000: 31).

Woman's action to end patriarchy's oppressions in Glaspell's play 'Trifles'

“...it must have been done awful crafty and still ... funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that There was a gun in the house” (Glaspell, 483)

Mrs. Wright, as the round character, did not really exist in Susan Glaspell's drama. Readers could not see her physical appearance nor her voice. The only thing readers know is her action and its effect which became the theme of Glaspell's drama.

As the experienced women writer, Glaspell did not create the physical appearance of a main woman character in her

work. Glaspell would like to ask readers to know the fact that women's physical appearance is not important to break through the patriarchy chain. In fact, the echo of women's action would always last longer and left tremendous effect ever. The same condition can be found in Glaspell's 'Trifles' in which Mrs. Wright existence was represented by her actions. Mrs. Wright's did not say a word at the time her husband asked her to live in a remote area and not to mingle around. Bird was the only media left for her to be happy and to communicate. Unfortunately, her husband could not take for having a bird in their house, that is why he killed the bird. Mrs. Wright's desperation feeling prompted her to end her husband's life by killing him with a rope instead of a gun when he was asleep. The rope was a perfect choice for Mrs. Wright to kill her husband simply because it was voiceless. The same action done by her husband when he killed the bird, the only valuable possession of Mrs. Minnie Wright to which she can talk.

Mrs. Wright's action put to an end the patriarchy oppressions and restrictions towards human's need to communicate and to sing. Thus, even though Mrs. Minnie Wright spent her life in prison, but she was happy still since it was only physical 'tortures'. Psychological state is always more meaningful because it determines someone's real happiness.

CONCLUSION

As the first citizen in patriarchy society, men became superior over anything. That is why men tend to force women to do everything they want to. As a result, women life aspects were

marginalized and gap of role occurred. Women's economy and social life were marginalized by men as to cover that men were actually weak. Men ignored women's economy and social life because they did not feel convenient with women's presence. However, women turned out to be strong simply because men's fragile was finally widely wide-open.

Women's role seemed to be restricted at domestic sphere only. On the contrary, men were free to actively take a part at public sphere. The gap was accustomed at the early education at home which preserved by mothers, the victim of patriarchy oppression. However, women could be active at public sphere which was shown by Mrs. Minnie Wright when she was still a single woman.

At last, women were able to set themselves free from the chain of patriarchy by doing action, not by uttering any necessary sounds. Voices were not eye-catching for men. Doing a trivial thing echoed longer and broke down the oppressions of patriarchy. That is why Glaspell, as the writer of drama entitled 'Trifles', did not show the physical appearance of the woman as the main character.

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