

EXISTING FEMINISM IN HELEN GARNER'S MONKEY GRIP

Delukman A

Politeknik Informatika Nasional Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

E-mail: lukemultatuli19@mail.com

E-ISSN : 2615-3092

P-ISSN : 2615-3084

Abstract. Man and woman are created by God in equality position, but in many aspects of life, man reveals domination and discrimination to woman. The aim of the study is to investigate Helen Garner's work, *Monkey Grip* (1977). The researcher focuses on the issue of feminism that exists in the novel. The researcher identifies feminism issues based on the two ways, they are behavior and language. Behavior of feminism includes the idea and the action. The idea means a wish or concept of the woman character to get freedom, then action is implementation of the idea. Language of feminism means how the woman expresses sexual desire in the novel. Moreover, this research uses sociological approach to see relation between the novel and society. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. The primary data are taken by the novel *Monkey Grip* by Helen Garner and secondary data are taken by some journals, books, and articles. From the research, the researcher found that the woman character could stand without a husband. The woman character who gets discrimination by a man can leave her special friend. Furthermore, the woman character in this story talks about sexual desire freely and openly. The author of this novel tries to argue that it is not taboo to talk about sexual desire in the novel anymore. The research also reveals relation between the author and the novel where the author brings her experiences in her life into the novel, such as unhappy marriage. Moreover, this research is a kind of liberal feminism. Liberal feminism believe that woman have to be independent woman in private and public sphere.

Keywords: Feminism, woman, behavior, language

<http://sastra.unifa.ac.id/journal/index.php/jes/index>

INTRODUCTION

Nature creates human kind into two kinds. They are man and woman. Man and woman cannot be separated because they need each other to keep the human life. In fact, there is domination of one gender to another. Generally, discrimination is men are superior and women are inferior. Accordingly, women feel that there is something wrong, because there is no justice between men and women in many aspects.

People make assumptions because women are not as strong as men, so they cannot take same opportunity like men. This opinion influences society and at the same time, women will get difficulties to find a job. Furthermore, women are described as waiter for men, where women's job is only to follow what men want. Long time ago in Greek, Aristotle in Arivia (2003), states in his book *Politics* says that men are superior and women are inferior. Women only stay at house

where women's jobs is only bearing baby and women forbid to discuss about politics.

Aristotle in Arivia (2003), writes that there are three types of human they are man, woman and slave. In the functional part, slave and woman are property, woman and slave are same. Aristotle is not the only one philosopher who gives negative perception about women, but many philosophers have the same opinion, such as Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Immanuel Kant and Frederich Nietzsche. Their opinions are damaging women position (misogyny). In the Thesaurus Dictionary, Arivia (2003), writes that *misogyny is anti feminism: male chauvinism; superiority of men; sexism, hater of woman; and its antonym is feminism*. Misogyny does not only appear in philosophy, but also in all aspects of human life, for example in culture.

Danesi & Perron (1999), states Each new infant is born with relatively few innate traits, yet with a vast number potential behaviors, and therefore must be reared in cultural setting so that

it can achieve its biological potential. Cultural setting indicates that culture is arranged. Culture is something made by people and done for many years. Kluckhohn in Smith (2000), argues that culture is a rule or way of life. People must follow what the rules of culture in society. A society product some rules about women, one of them is patriarchy. Patriarchy is men's domination, where women only as a waiter for men. The cultural perceptions about women are kept by people in society. In literature, sociology is important to be an approach where Edraswara (2013), states that sociology of literature is an approach in literature research which focuses on human problem.

Based on men's domination, women stand to get same opportunity as men. Showalter (1985), states that while, feminism is a women movement which becomes international movement in 1960s. In the world, women search for equality in all aspects of life because women do not have the same opportunity as men in many aspects. Feminism grew up because of the bad situation for women. All situations in our society do not give good chance for women actions. There are many limitations given by men to women, including rules of society. It is one reason of women movements which makes women use all media to battle for men domination. One of the media is literature.

Feminism is based on the term of 'feminine' which talks about women. Moore in Barry (1995), says that feminism, women and feminine are political position. As political women movement, feminism is the way to get equality as men, because women and men are not same in politics, economics, culture and society. The system of human life does not give the same chance to women and men. This inspired John Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor to write *The Subjection of Women* 1869. Humm (1992), states that their work is regarded as a classical liberal argument for equal rights. Women need to organize women's voice to against men domination. Feminism issues are stronger when women author talk about women, because as women, they might also differ as other women, for example in Australian

literature, is Helen Garner. Her first work is *Monkey Grip* where she talks about women issues. *Monkey Grip* is a controversial work because it talks about sexual desire openly. Pierce (2009), mentions that Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip* (1977) is generally regarded as marking the emergence of feminist perspective. Birns & McNeer (2007), writes that as a literary work that describes human condition, *Monkey Grip* tells about sexual and economic exploitation in the Australian pastoral industry.

The rationale of my choice discussing and interpreting feminism issues that are greatly illustrated in characters' utterances as well as the events performed through the story. Sexual appeal seems for to be one side of mainly the sake of woman. It is not because of struggle to be happy in a family, but also to be equality in each role in a family. The movement of feminist is against man domination in some positions and social roles.

The aim of the study is to investigate Helen Garner's work, *Monkey Grip* (1977). The researcher focuses on the issue of feminism that exists in the novel. Moreover, the researcher chooses to identify this novel because there are still few students in English Language Studies take Australian literature as the object of their research. Then, the researcher will try to reveal a women movement in Australian novel that written by a woman.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the researcher will use descriptive qualitative method. Denzin & Yvonna (1994), mention that qualitative descriptive research (case studies), this method will let researcher analyze and describe the data. Qualitative method is a method to collect and analyze data. This research will take the data from two sources, they are primary and secondary data. Primary data will be taken from the novel *Monkey Grip* 1997 by Helen Garner. The researcher will read the novel carefully, then write important point about feminism. The secondary data will be taken from various books, journals, and articles as well.

This research is library research. In collecting the data of this research, the researcher will apply some steps: the researcher reads the novel carefully and takes the note of the data that are related to feminism issues. Then, providing particular fragments of issues that support research questions. Data analysis covers the following steps: The researcher selects the related data on issues of feminism in the story. The next step is reading and rereading them carefully. Then, the research presents the issues that exist in selected fragments. The last step is qualifying feminism issues.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this part the researcher begins to present the data that have been found in the novel *Monkey Grip* by Helen Garner. The researcher focuses on the behavior and language issues of feminism in the story. Then, the researcher explains the data that have been found. The researcher will divide the data into two kinds, first is based on behavior of the character to get freedom and the second is based on language of the character in expressing sexual relation.

Behavior

In this section, the researcher will identify behavior of the character in getting freedom in two ways, they are the idea of feminism and the action of feminism.

1. The Idea

The researcher will present the idea of Nora (the main character/woman character) to get freedom. The following data run such as follows:

In a shop window in Merimbula I saw my face reflected and gave my self a freight: my hair was wild and stiff with salt, standing on and all over my head. My face was burnt almost back to paleness and my eyes stared out of dirty skin I liked my self: I looked strong and healthy. (Garner, 1977:3)

The quotation above reveals that Nora is the strong and healthy woman as the single parent who has to keep the child, arrange the house and

go to work. She has a child that she has to keep and give good education. Nora could take and divide her time for her job and family. She was strong as a single parent who lives without a husband. It indicates that she can stand and stay with her life problems without a man.

What am going to do? the question was already rhetorical: she was on her feet, gathering up her bag, pulling herself together. 'I dunno. Battle on, I guess. It's like what Eve says "life's a struggle". we both began to giggle at the mental picture of Eve the trooper, head forward in work-horse position, ready for the harness. (Garner, 1977:33)

Based on the description above, it can be seen that Nora and Rita discussed about their problems in their life, and at the time Nora remember what Eve's says about life that "life is a struggle". Nora, Rita and Eve are three women who have to stay as the strong women. They have fought in their difficult condition. Nora must keep her daughter by herself without a husband. Generally, as the woman, she needs a man to love her and she needs a husband to give love in the family including love for her daughter.

2. The Action

The researcher will present the action of Nora to get freedom. The following data run such as follows:

There was plenty of good dope around. Gracie was at school. The sun shone every day. I rode my bike everywhere. I went to the library. I was reading two novels a day. When Gracie came home from school we would doze off on bed in the hot afternoon. For days at the time there was no my sign of Javo. one night George and Gracie and I went to the Pram factory to see a play, and didn't come till two in the morning. We rode home, spending along, Gracie on the back of my bike like a quite monkey. The moon hung in the deep, deep blue sky, the air was dotty with stars. We sailed serenely through floods

*of warm autumn air. Gracie sang a song.
(Garner, 1977:37)*

This paragraph shows that as the single woman who has many activities in the outside and inside of the home, Nora always tries to give much time for her family. When Nora goes to the library and reads two novels in a day, it is Nora's necessary as the woman to enjoy her life. When Gracie comes home, she prepares and accompanies her daughter. Then, in the night, she invites Gracie and George to see the play in Pram factory. That is the sign that Nora as the single parent can divide her time for herself and her family. Moreover, this quotation reveals that Javo goes to outside and he doesn't give information to Nora about his condition. Some days ago, Javo sometimes accompanies Nora, but at the day Nora goes to outside with her family without Javo. It is described that even Nora loves Javo, but she can give her nice time to herself and her family.

I felt like the mother of two headstrong opinionated boys. My bones flooded with weakness, I stared at the metal bed. No-one spoke. I stopped caring about seeming straight or motherly. (Garner, 1977:38)

Based on the quotation above, Garner reveals to the reader that the main character (Nora) is a single mother and as a special friend of a junkie (Javo), she has to stay to keep Javo when Javo gets sick in the hospital. In some cultural perspectives, they judge woman as the weak character who does not have a power. But this quotation shows us that women have a power. In this case, Nora keeps for Javo in the hospital, even it in the same time she has to keep her daughter. Nora felt like a mother of Javo, when she arrives in the hospital where Javo got treatment

Language

In this part, the researcher will present the way of Nora as woman character in expressing sexual relation. The following data run such as follows:

I was starting to notice that I hadn't fucked for a long time. It wasn't the fucking I missed: I wanted love. I felt sad and hungry, or greedy rather, wishing to comfort my self. I ate small snacks all morning, felt disgusted with myself, and returned to my room upstairs to pick away at the walls hour after hour. Lou came to visit me. He worked with me all one afternoon. He kept dropping his scraper and dashing over to me and hugging me ferociously, kissing me and hugging me and making much of me, saying.

'ooh, isn't it this sexy work!'

He stopped me for feeling sad in the fresh

'I haven't fucked for weeks', I remarked. 'I dream all the dream about fucking with guys I know. (Garner, 1977:57)

In this quotation, Nora as a woman who needs sexual relation with a man talks Lou about her condition. She tells to Lou that she never fucking for weeks, and she would find to fuck with her guy who she knew. In some cultures, talking about sexual issue is a kind of taboo to be discussed woman openly, but here the quotation above shows that Nora talks about her sexual desire freely. Generally, woman is not like man who usually talks about sex freely and openly

I told him I wouldn't fuck with him again while he was seeing her.' She turned her eyes sideways to me with a childlike, tearful smile. 'But... I'm scared he might, ... rape me,' she whispered hopefully. 'He's really strong, you know.' (Garner, 1977:192)

The quotation shows a short conversation between Nora and Angela. Nora clearly says that she doesn't want to fuck with Javo anymore. Nora is scared when Javo came, because he will force her to making love. When Javo forces to making love, it is like a rape. Nora is afraid of Javo's attitude because he will be a monster when he wants to making love with Nora. On the other side, Nora and Angela are two women who are talking about sex freely. In the end of this quotation reveals that they talking

about Javo's energy when making love 'He's really strong, you know.' It's something taboo for women to talk about sex. Generally, women are taboo to talk about sex openly and freely.

This research reveals that the main character or woman character can stand without a husband and she discusses about sexual desire freely and openly. The main character shows both behavior and language issues of feminism. As the woman who has married and has a daughter, Nora stands and enjoys her life without a man. So, she can live with her daughter and she doesn't need to be afraid about her life without a husband. Moreover, Garner shows that the woman character is stronger than man. Nora in her busy time and difficult condition with her relation always puts her daughter as the main priority. When she promises to Gracie, she will attend and accompany her daughter. She is against her sexual desire as a woman for leaving Javo. Nora can find money by herself and she can keep her daughter. The statement that woman is the weak and always depends on the man, it's not true in this novel because she can get money and give education to her daughter. Moreover, woman in this story isn't a complement for a man. In contrast, Javo is the complement for Nora because Javo only comes to Nora when he wants to "fuck" her. This is the complement of biological side.

Behavior includes wish to get freedom by man, the way Nora's life as mother of her daughter, Nora's attitude to her friends and her job inside and outside of the home. Language issues of feminism include the way of a woman in Australia express her feeling and talking about sex freely and openly.

Moreover, The main character clearly against subordinate. As Mill states in *The subject of Woman* (1869) that women accept subordinate without complaining is not apply in this story. Nora against Javo's action and hate him when he is like a monster. Nora also describes to against the old opinion about women which says that women only stay and work at home to keep the house and kids. The researcher writes in relation between feminism and family that women's job at

home is very hard, so women will be stronger than men when they can take job inside and outside of the home. Furthermore, society believe that man is a head of the family who have important role to give good life for family, but Nora as women who can find money by herself without Javo, so it shows that she is a head of the family. The novel reveals the Friedan statements about creative mothers. Betty Friedan as the first president of NOW (National Organization of Women) in Humm (1992), states that second stage of feminism would find ways of enabling women to be creative mothers with fulfillment careers. Nora as the mother who has to keep the house and kids, she also can take a job outside the house. She could be a mother and she also enjoyed her career or her job. Her small family didn't disturb her job and her job didn't disturb her family. Moreover, her problems with Javo didn't influence both of her family and job. She could go with her daughter and she could take her job without Javo's hand. In Humm's book *Feminisms (a reader)* she puts Betty Friedan's work in Liberal feminism. Liberal feminism is the old woman movement, but *Monkey Grip*, the Australian novel reveals the issue of liberal feminism. In another hand, *Monkey Grip* is considered that it brings Garner's experiences, where the novel reveals many events that refer to the Garner's life such as unhappy marriage and her life with junkies. Moreover, some people critics that *Monkey Grip* is like Garner's diary. Corris in Abbas (2013), mentions that Helen Garner has published her private journal rather than written a novel. It is a statement that Garner's work (*Monkey Grip*) refers to the Helen Garner's life. Relation between an author with work will reveal in the theme or the issue of work. Some authors can't be separated by their environment or society where they live. Moreover, the authors sometimes show their protest by writing literary works. In this novel, Helen Garner wants to show that woman can stand without man and woman is not taboo to talk about sexual desire anymore. This novel also tries to describe the social condition around 1970 in Australia, especially woman condition.

CONCLUSION

Man's domination and discrimination are described in Javo's character, but Nora brings woman voice (feminism) against Javo. Moreover, the way to express her feeling, such as sexual issue is not as something which is taboo anymore. Nora and the other characters discuss about sex freely and openly, where many people believe that such a discussion is taboo for women. Garner tries to argue that it is not taboo to take sexual issues into the novel, where she proves such an argument by publishing the novel. After analyzing *Monkey Grip* by Helen Garner by using feminism issues, especially behavior and language, the researcher would like to present some suggestions. The researcher hopes this research can help the students and the readers to understand about feminism issues in the novel. Moreover, they can use feminism theory to identify other novels which related with feminism. The researcher hopes this research can invite the students to look and identify about Australian literature because Australian literature is not like England and American literature. There are still few students of English literature that take Australian literature as the object of their research. The last, the researcher hopes this research can give information to the students and the readers about Australian literature, feminism issues of behavior and language, and Australian woman voice around 1970s.

REFERENCES

- Abbas H. (2013). *Dancing with Australian Feminism: Helen Garner's Postcards from Surfers Viewed from a Buginese Perspective with a Partial Translation into Indonesian*. Australia: The University of Newcastle.
- Arivia G. (2003). *Filsafat Berperspektif Feminis*. Jakarta Selatan : Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan.
- Barry P.(1995). *Beginning Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Birns N & McNeer R. (2007). *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1990*. New York: Camden House.
- Danesi M & Perron P. (1999). *An Analyzing Cultures*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Denzin N. K & Yvonna S. L. (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publication.
- Edraswara S. (2013). *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*. Jakarta: CAPS.
- Humm M. (1992). *Feminism. A Reader*. Britain: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Pierce P. (2009). *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Showalter E. (1985). *The New Feminist Criticism*. United States: Pantheon Books.
- Smith P. (2000). *Cultural Theory*. USA: Blackwell publisher.