

THE FREEDOM OF WOMAN IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY ENGLISH NOVEL: A CASE ON VIRGINIA WOOLF'S NOVEL *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

Dian Nurrachman

UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung
Email: diannurrachman@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstract

Freedom is always a longing for everyone. Freedom is a dream that must be achieved in broadly life; it is not only a kind of utopia, but should be united in reality. By the freedom one can do anything, for the freedom is over all. Once the freedom being shackled, the struggle for liberation will become a necessary one. Such a struggle is not always and only appeared in the physical appearances, but also appears in the ideas against the establishment of hegemony. Those thesis statements above are discursive formations that is used to analyze the struggling ideas of Lily Briscoe; one of the characters that in Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*. Lily Briscoe is important to appear because she broaches ideas, statements, and questions that refer to her struggle for liberating herself from the patriarchal hegemony, including patriarchal ideal of womanhood. In accordance with such a struggle, the combination theoretical framework of Marxist-Feminism with a little "deconstructive" reading will be an interesting discussion here.

Keywords: freedom of woman, self-consciousness, feminine and masculine consciousness

INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* discusses the patriarchal social order of the Victorian era and questions the differences in social roles between men and women. Throughout the novel, we discover that there are two different worlds: the world of men, the world of men, and the world of women, the world of women. Masculinity is characterized by selfishness, stubbornness, and an emphasis on intelligence over emotion. In contrast, the feminine is characterized by imagination, intuition, and a willingness to compromise. Mrs. Ramsay represents a traditional, submissive woman in a patriarchal society. The medium is emotion, and the form is human relationships. Lily Briscoe is the epitome of a woman who doesn't fit the mold and defies gender boundaries. The medium is intellect and the form is painting. Through Woolf's projections of Mrs. Ramsay's life and relationships with male characters, she reinforces the female values of fertility, giving, and creating harmony associated with Mrs. Ramsay. But Woolf criticizes the way she fits her positive femininity into her definition of masculinity. Woolf's projection of Lily Briscoe's life and her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay and his male characters are an attempt to teach women to embrace their femininity, cultivate their masculinity, and choose the roles they want to play as independent women.

To the Lighthouse also reflects how life was affected by the political, social, economic, and cultural changes that occurred after World War I, and reflects the emotional impact of modern life. This shows how tension and pressure destroy the means of communication between people. It also emphasizes that personal relationships bring order and meaning to life, and when traditional life values and beliefs are lost, relationships become seriously damaged. This is proven by the characters' inability to communicate with each other. For example, the Ramsay family and their guests live together, but each is an isolated soul. This book reflects the misery and isolation of women whose lives are shaped by moral, ideological and conventional ways.

However, Woolf introduces female characters such as Lily Briscoe who symbolize hope, and convey the powerful message that women can be broken but never defeated. *To*



the Lighthouse also describes how Woolf used her novel to teach women how to give meaning to their lives and realize their own identity. This book reveals the causes of oppression and the condition of women's powerlessness, and provides comprehensive answers to women's problems. Woolf lamented that the talents of women writers were suppressed by authoritarian forces that prevented women from honestly expressing how they felt about their bodies and minds.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The discussion is started with the assumption that one indefinitely allegorize the relationship of woman in the term of Marx's *use value*, *exchange value*, and *surplus value*, by suggesting "that woman in the traditional social situation produces more than she is getting in term of her subsistence, and therefore is a continually source of the production of surpluses, *for* the man who owns her, or *by* the man for the capitalist who owns *his* labor power" (Spivak, 1968). To be positioned on Spivak's statement, so here I brought to the discussion one of the characters in Virginia Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse* who tried to break such a suggestion of traditional social situation of women, so that her struggle from her class, that is young woman and artist as a representation of feminism can be achieved. Firstly, let us take a look at the following citation about Lily's first struggle, when she compared Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Bankes.

I respect you (she addressed him silently) in every atom; you are not vain; you are entirely impersonal; you are finer than Mr. Ramsay; you are the first human being that I know; you have neither wife nor child (without any sexual feeling she longed to cherish that loneliness), you live for science (involuntarily, section of potatoes rose before her eyes); praise would be insult to you; generous, pure hatred, heroic man! (Woolf, 1991: 26-27)

The comparison above constitutes the early point of Lily's struggle to get liberation, for she could not liberate herself from men without learning them. By comparing Mr. Bankes as finer than Mr. Ramsay, she wanted to break the establishment of Ramsay's family by appreciating Mr. Bankes' loneliness. Previously, she indeed realized and even wondered that Ramsay's family is able to establish, whereas, "the Ramsays were not rich, and it was a wonder how they managed to contrive it all. Eight children! To feed eight children on philosophy!" (Woolf, 1991: 24). But thus, she continued this comparison and changes it into hatred. She hated Mr. Ramsay. She did not want to be like Mrs. Ramsay who is bounded by her husband's tyranny, even though she also trapped in this patriarchal boundary.

You have greatness, she continued, but Mr. Ramsay has none of it. He is pretty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death (Woolf, 1991: 27)

In Lily's view, Mrs. Ramsay is only a source which is exploited by the man who owns her, that is Mr. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay, then, becomes only a labor to produce surpluses; she is only a commodity. This makes an advantage for the capitalist (Mr. Ramsay) who owns the labor power (Mrs. Ramsay). The establishment of family, therefore, become only a mask to cover such an exploitation, and Lily Briscoe wants to stop this; at least for she herself.

However, there is also an ironical statement; Lily's struggle made its compensation. When she started to stop and to break Mr. Ramsay's tyranny, she had to compare him first to Mr. Bankes. It means that she could not survive her struggle without departing it from the power of man. In patriarchal society, women become passive. Women only accept culture which allows man to dominate, including the ideological and cultural determinant

of expression. Thus, as one who are being dominated, Lily had to transform the patriarchal culture into her own consciousness. As Gerda Lerner argues,

“Women live their social existence within the general culture and, whenever they are confined by patriarchal restraint or segregation into separateness (which always has subordination as it’s purpose), they transform this restraint into complementarities (asserting the importance of woman’s function, even “its superiority”) and redefine it. Thus, women live a duality—as members of the general culture and as partakers of women’s culture” (in Showalter, 1994).

This cultural domination is often unrealized quietly by Lily Briscoe, she denied the expression of Mr. Bankes about Mr. Ramsay that he (Mr. Ramsay) is a bit of hypocrite, even though in the end, she stated more that she is tyrannical.

A bit of hypocrite? She repeated. Oh no—the most sincere of men, the truest (here he was), the best; but looking down, she thought, he is absorbed in himself, he is tyrannical, he is unjust; and kept looking down, purposely, for only so could she keep steady, staying with the Ramsays (Woolf, 1991: 53).

Lily’s rejection is not only as a representation of her unconsciousness to such a cultural domination of men, but also naturally constitutes an attempt to show that woman can “speak” and “disagreeable” toward man’s statement. She does not want to be like Mrs. Ramsay who “gave her husband what he asked too easily”. So, even though her mind tends to be ambivalent at glance, actually she broaches the idea of rebellion. Lily wants to show that she is different from Mrs. Ramsay, and she is greatly astonished why does Mr. Ramsay become one who loved by men; why does she become an ideal woman according to men, including Mr. Bankes. She asked this matter in relation that she also a woman: a young woman, artist, and has a vision. I supposed it as a kind of her jealousy.

How did she differ? What was the spirit in her, the essential thing, by which, had you found a glove in the corner of a sofa, you would have known it, from its twisted finger, hers indisputably (Woolf, 1991: 55).

However, Lily immediately recovered this jealousy. She did not want to be “Angel in the House” that place woman beneath man as an inferior class. She rejected Mrs. Ramsay’s premise that “an unmarried woman has missed the best of life” (Woolf, 1991: 56). The following is such a rejection from her.

She would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that;and confront Mrs. Ramsay’s simple certainty (Woolf, 1991: 57).

Here, Lily Briscoe found her own identity. Her rejection is a fact that she would never marry at all. This is the idea of feminism that Lily Briscoe bears with. She eliminates the consciousness of her own femininity which is ‘inferior’ into the unconsciousness of ‘anonymity’. By stating that “she was not made for that”; means for being a wife, she breaks the entire system of patriarchal discourses. She does not want to be trapped on the man’s truth, so she confronts Mrs. Ramsay as an ideal woman—certainly according to patriarchal discourse. Such an identity also constitutes a dissolving between masculine and feminine

consciousness, so the anonymity –as I have said—being reached without annihilating herself; the consciousness of self that she is woman*.

Paradoxically, this struggle of identity and rebellion also reveal a kind of compensation for Lily Briscoe. It can be seen from her alienation with all that possessed by, so that she became liked to be alone.

Oh but, Lily would say, there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting. But all this seemed so little, so virginal, against the other (Woolf, 1991: 56)

This alienation is a compensation from her ‘speaking’ in which against the establishment of patriarchy; the compensation that must be accepted if woman does not want to be outside the historical process; the compensation to reach history and its discourse. This is what Xaviere Gauthier emphasized: that to enact social change, woman must find a way to speak that exceeds and eludes traditional male language (in Booker, 1996: 90). Gauthier then argues:

“Women are, in fact, caught in a very real contradiction. As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process. But, if they begin to speak and write *as men do*, they enter history subdued and alienated” (in Booker, 1996: 90).

However, this alienation did not influence too much for Lily, even, she was so dare so much to counter-attack what is established. As an artist, she is very confident about herself. She refused the discourse that is brought by Mr. Bankes; learning other pictures is good for doing work, especially painting. Lily reflected that perhaps it was better not to see other pictures: “they only made one hopelessly discontented with one’s own work” (Woolf, 1991: 82). So, for her, painting is both for working and pleasure, because it interested her. She never expects her painting to gratify anyone but herself. This is the uniqueness of her feminist ideas. She seems to make her art as a device for rejecting ‘inferiorization’ and placing it outside the truth of ‘man’; outside patriarchal discourse and redefine female creation to counter male’s. Truly, this phenomenon is yet from the result of alienation; for she “liked to be alone”. This general thesis has been given by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar such as follow.

“Thus the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessor coupled with her need for sisterly predecessors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self dramatization, her dread of patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention—all these phenomena of “inferiorization” mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart” (in Showalter, 1994).

Nevertheless, such a Lily Briscoe’s idea wants to break out also the pronouncement from Charles Tansley that “women can’t write, women can’t paint”. As we know, in the anxious world of patriarchy or male competition, women’s activities are confined. Women, then, become “angel in the house” in providing support for men. Such a social imbalance

* For this reason, I took the analytical statement from Helene Cixous about the transformation of anonymity; see it completely in M. Keith Booker, 1996, *A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism*, Longman Publisher, page 92.

made women so much in border and lost their autonomous activities as human being. They only managing family as well as possible, and afterward, they sit, talk, laugh, and eat. Therefore, it is very natural if Woolf herself proposed in her famous essay "A Room of One's Own" that there is so much greatly masculine opinion in which said that there is nothing intellectual characteristics expected from women (in Heraty, 2000: 172). The following citation is again Charles Tansley's view about woman in which support the thesis above.

They never got anything worth having from one's year end to another. They did talk, talk, talk, eat, eat, eat. It was the women's fault. Women made civilization impossible with all their 'charm', all their silliness (Woolf, 1991: 98).

At glance, Charles Tansley's view constitutes an antithesis of feminism, whereas, it constitutes one of the causing factors of feminist movement; in other words, it indeed supports the thesis of feminism. With a little deconstructive reading, the statement of *it was the woman's fault* can be changed into *it is the men's fault*. I dare to say that because what is conditioned to woman to be inferior is not the woman's fault, on the contrary, it is the men's fault with all their patriarchal system until today, so that "it was" become "it is". So, by what reason then, Charles Tansley blamed women? This is also the matter that asked by Lily Briscoe, and it becomes a rebellion toward such a view above. These are Lily's questions to that matter.

Then why did she mind what he said? Women can't write, women can't paint—what did that matter coming from him, since clearly it was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him, and that was why he said it? (Woolf, 1991: 98).

By those questions, Lily Briscoe is steady so much to construct her identity as a *subject* that is able to *speak*, not as an *object* that is exploited by man. By her painting, then, she transforms the art of living into her liberation. Lily's paintings reject the code of behavior that requires a woman to accommodate the male ego, so it makes Lily herself becomes the woman who break out the view that in patriarchal society, women "choose" to do the housework. Such this context is only occurred if woman itself becomes "object" for man's exploitation.

CONCLUSION

By her paintings, Lily Briscoe actually seeks the balancing transformation of self-consciousness; it means that the feminine consciousness must be balanced by the masculine unconsciousness. It can be seen from her concept of love in accordance with Mr. Bankes "rapture", such as follow.

It was love, she thought, pretending to move her canvas, distilled and filtered; love that never attempted to clutch it's object; but like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of human gain. There is nothing more tedious, puerile, and inhumane than love; yet also beautiful and necessary (Woolf, 1991: 117).

Such a concept of love above is combined with Lily's own life's movement whereby she lived and active inside. Thus, all being reduced into painting, and finally, she reached the balance. Lily herself is freed from patriarchal domination, but her painting also will be

forgotten, will be hung in the attics and destroyed; the painting of which is as a symbol of her liberation. This can be seen from Lily's last visions as I cite below.

Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its green and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? She asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the center. It was done; it was finished. Yes she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue. I have had my vision (Woolf, 1991: 238).

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