

GENDER STRUGGLE OF MAIN CHARACTER IN EDITH WHARTON'S *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* NOVEL

Fergie Eka Wahyu Nusantara, Nasrullah, and Jonathan Irene Sartika Dewi Max
English Literature Department, Faculty of Sciences
Mulawarman University
Email : FergiEka97@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Feminism examines every gender gap, from identity, discrimination, and exploitation. One of the focuses in the study of gender identity is gender struggle and being present in novels. This research discusses the gender struggle for female characters, namely Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's novel *The House of Mirth*. The purpose of this study is to identify the existence of gender struggles experienced by the character of Lily Bart and describe the development of characters in these struggles. This research uses qualitative research methodology and gender struggle studies. Furthermore, the theory used in gender struggle includes several experts (Paddy MacQueen, Bell Hooks, several other experts) and Jonathan Webber's theory of character development. In this case, the forms of struggle are characterized in character development analysis which seeks to find changes in the character of Lily Bart and its correlation to her struggle. The development of the character of Lily Bart is described in three phases. In the initial phase introduces the main objectives, the second phase changes due to conflict and challenges, and the third phase becomes the result of character change. The results showed that the character of Lily Bart as the main character in the novel shows a gender struggle. The forms of gender struggle that are experienced include facts of life, dream, love and affection. In this case, the forms of struggle are characterized in character development analysis which seeks to find changes in the character of Lily Bart and its correlation to her struggle.

Keywords: feminism criticism, novel, gender struggle, *The House of Mirth*

ABSTRAK

*Feminisme mengkaji setiap kesenjangan-kesenjangan terhadap gender, mulai dari identitas, diskriminasi, dan eksploitasi. Salah satu focus dalam kajian identitas gender adalah perjuangan gender dan hadir dalam novel. Penelitian ini membahas tentang perjuangan gender kepada karakter wanita yaitu Lily Bart didalam novel Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi akan adanya perjuangan gender yang dialami oleh karakter Lily Bart dan menggambarkan perkembangan karakter dalam perjuangannya tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi penelitian kualitatif dan kajian perjuangan gender. Selanjutnya, teori yang digunakan dalam gender struggle mencakup beberapa ahli (Paddy MacQueen, Bell Hooks, beberapa pakar lainnya) dan teori perkembangan karakter Jonathan Webber. Dalam hal ini, bentuk – bentuk perjuangan*

tersebut di karakterisasikan dalam analisa perkembangan karakter yang berupaya mencari adanya perubahan pada karakter Lily Bart dan korelasinya terhadap perjuangannya. Perkembangan karakter Lily Bart dijelaskan menjadi tiga fase. Pada fase awal memperkenalkan tujuan utama, fase kedua perubahan akibat konflik dan tantangan, dan fase ketiga menjadi hasil dari perubahan karakter. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa karakter Lily Bart sebagai karakter utama dalam novel menunjukkan adanya perjuangan gender. Bentuk – bentuk perjuangan gender yang dialami antara lain fakta akan kehidupan, mimpi, cinta, dan kasih sayang. Dalam hal ini, bentuk – bentuk perjuangan tersebut di karakterisasikan dalam analisa perkembangan karakter yang berupaya mencari adanya perubahan pada karakter Lily Bart dan korelasinya terhadap perjuangannya.

Kata Kunci: kritik feminis, novel, gender struggle, *The House of Mirth*

A. INTRODUCTION

Female has been the object of weak and fragile and become the reflection of softness, beauty, fairness, and kindness. Female is also be the object of many literary works that related to social, political, and many more from poem, novel, short story, song and others. Therefore, females created a movement in nineteenth century. The movement to rise female and woman degree it's now called feminism. The feminism movement or "women movement" of the 1960 was not, of course, the start of feminism (Barry 116).

For a woman the existence of a desire for themselves is a challenge in life. This challenge is inversely proportional to men because of differences in position and acceptance in social life. Women have more challenges and more restrictions because their position is still in their abilities and roles which are compared to men to achieve the goals or ambitions that women want. This is a gender struggle for women to gain recognition by finding their main goals or desires in life despite the differences in capabilities compared to men. Gender struggle exists as a form of recognition of social society in measuring and seeing how women get the rights to their goals. In addition, the novel will be theoretically analyzed to see how the process of maintaining the status and tragic life through the struggle for gender recognition as women in *The House of Mirth*. A case in the globalization era where all this concerns status and money.

This study will describe how a literary work represents gender struggle in the novel. *The House of Mirth* novel is analyzed by using the approach of feminism by focusing towards the gender struggle. The focus of this research is to analyze all female struggles that happen towards main female character. The correlation between structure of work and social structures are interconnected in the novel. *The House of Mirth* is a novel that tells the struggle of the main female characters who face many obstacles in the lives of high-status women who are less able to withstand economic pressures. This novel shows the efforts made by the main characters in the context of feminism.

B. RELATED LITERATURE

1. Gender Struggle

According to MacQueen, the struggle for gender recognition is literally not only on the issue of women as social creatures, but rather as evidence of their actions to make them feel comfortable. It can be said that this struggle is not easy to face on (3). Moreover, the struggle for direct recognition is not trivial in society, especially for women. It is because the impact of this struggle has limitations and uncertain outcomes. According to MacQueen, gender struggle is one part of feminism literature. The focus of the gender struggle in the literature is to look for any woman effort that has the impression of social relations over other genders, especially men. Therefore, the recognition of every woman's efforts can be seen from the context that refers to the recognition of others in order to create a clear fact of recognition (164).

2. Types of Gender Struggle

a. Love

Love is one of the deepest emotions in humans. In general, humans interpret love as a form of feeling towards something either person or object. Love itself in scientific and realistic studies is still an abstract and elusive thing. Fromm state,

“To love somebody is not just a strong feeling—it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever” (Fromm 56).

Love is considered abstract and difficult to understand because it consists of various kinds of things that are indeed difficult to guess. Love consists of promises, decisions, and judgment. These three things are clearly very difficult for someone to find the limit. Therefore, struggle is the only way to find the main points of these things. In conclusion, love is said to be difficult to understand directly. As explained above the statement of love to someone is very difficult to know the limits and their meaning. The reason is that love itself consists of various efforts and struggles to be realized. Principally, love can never be interpreted clearly but can be seen through the efforts that have been passed by someone to get someone else's love.

b. Dream

According to Bryson, women cannot realize their main desires because of gender inequality. This causes women to be easily exploited and manipulated to prefer their partners' desires and women are only supporters. Free from the pressure of the function and role of women in society is one of their desires. Economic factors and male supremacy are obstacles to women's desire to be respected (258). Other experts also support the above statement. According to Hooks, in the study of feminism women will find it difficult to get their main desires either material or non-material because of oppression in terms of partnerships to establish relationships. This is where men take benefit from using women as an outlet for sexual desire, wealth, and status. That can create excessive obstacles for women. In general, women only want to be guaranteed equality in relationships and society (78-81).

c. Fact of Life

The struggle for the facts of life is often an attempt to survive in society. The function of this struggle is as a benchmark for humans to survive in their environment. Many things support human life. In general, humans have two types of needs in their environment. First, it is the primary necessity and the second is the

necessity need or desires. These two types of need sustain human life in order to survive in their environment. These two things motivate humans to understand the environment and their lives including their recognition, capabilities, and limitation.

In conclusion, the struggle about the facts of life is not only related to the meaning of human life and the necessities of life. More than that is the struggle to be able to realize the desire for other things above their general needs. These desires are clearly not as easy as the general needs to be achieved, but through various kinds of struggle and recognition. In feminism, the meaning of life is for gender equality. According to Tong, there are two main desires of women, namely: The control of women's lives without restrictions by men, including social, economic, identity, freedom, dreams, and respect. Eliminate all oppression of women mentally and physically. As well as recognizing women's functions, women's struggles, and women's abilities without discrimination and gender inequality (216).

d. Affection

Humans have different types of feelings within themselves. Compassion is a form of human feeling towards things they like. According to Dillow et al, humans directly need support to express and receive love. Therefore, affection exists to be able to realize love. Indeed, love cannot be measured in science. Affection is one thing that can be used as a limitation of love itself. Affection can also be interpreted as a form of communication towards the closeness, care, and fondness for another (102).

In conclusion, the struggle of women in achieving affection is not easy if examined. This is because it is inversely proportional to what women try to get from affection. If a woman is only looking for love, then it can be with kindness and treatment of affection, but the problem can lie with other people whether the person wants something other than love. So clearly, it changes the attitude of women to be insecure. Social status, material, and abilities are factors that make other people give different affection toward women.

3. Character Development

In character development, there are phases and stages that make a character interesting in the story. This phase is divided based on the development of the character which makes the character start a journey or create a new action. According to Garke, there are three phases in character development. The first phase is character recognition based on character characteristics. The second phase is about character problems starting from getting better or worse. The third phase is the final phase in which the character can be shown to have changed in nature or the outcome of the goal (247). Weiland also support this, that each character development is divided from different arcs but still has the same phase. Moreover, what distinguishes only the conflicts faced and the type of development there are positive, flat, negative arc. (11).

C. RESEARCH METHOD

The Research design that used in this research was qualitative research. Thus, The used of qualitative research because this research used the text of the novel as a search for meaning in the novel *The House of Mirth*. The main focus in qualitative

research is tried to find data in the form of text with the relationship between theory and study taken by to find meaning that match in theory and study.

The data from this study as a whole contain writings, words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, both dialogue and narration related to the type of women's gender struggle in feminist studies precisely gender recognition by focusing on character development and character struggle forms. In collecting data, reading thoroughly and in the research object is needed in order to make the stages of research. The initial research stage was reading, then storing data, categorizing the data, and finally interpreting the data. This study uses two theories, the theory is the theory of gender struggle by Paddy MacQueen as the main theory and as a supporting theory using the theory of character development.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Gender Struggles in *The House of Mirth*

The analysis focuses on Lily Bart as one of most important female main character in the novel. Technically, the novel is mostly on Lily Bart's perspective which is told by narrator and Lily Bart herself. The character Lily is described as a young woman in her 20s with a beautiful face and has the charm of a young woman's beauty unlike in the environment in which she lives. The analysis is presented below.

a. Struggle of Dream

The first form of struggle represented by the character in the story is the struggle for dreams. As Bryson's part of the theory explains, dreams are one of the struggles that focus on women's desires to be achieved for personal will. Forms of recognition of the inability of the main character in the struggle of dreams can be seen in the quote below.

Lily sank with a sigh into one of the shabby leather chairs.

“How delicious to have a place like this all to one's self! What a miserable thing it is to be a woman.” She leaned back in a luxury of discontent” (7).

This quotation shows that Lily feels jealous of one of the men she liked named Selden Lawrence who has a comfortable place to live by himself. Lily feels inferior to men that they can easily get what they want according to their dreams without significant problems. Lily feels sad to be a woman because of the limitations of her gender that made her unable to get what Lily wanted as Selden have.

b. Struggle of Fact of Life

The second type of gender struggle experienced by Lily Bart's character is the struggle for the facts of life. In the process of analyzing, the researcher tries to collect quotations and datas related to Lily's struggle in the context of the facts of life either through Lily Bart's own character or which leads to women's gender in general. It's different when Lily writes that men don't need to be that difficult in showing that they are a good person in the eyes of others because of the different world views of women and men.

“Ah, there's the difference—a girl must, a man may if he chooses.” She surveyed him critically. **“Your coat's a little shabby—but who cares?** It doesn't keep people from asking you to dine. If I were shabby no one would have me: a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. **The**

clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it. Who wants a dingy woman?...." (13).

The quotation above is Lily's opinion in seeing the difference between men and women in the eyes of the public. Lily feels that even if men have clothes that are not fashionable or neat, no one will care. It's different when Lily considers that if she is like that then no one wants to approach her or invite her to dinner and who also wants dingy woman. Lily's view can be considered as a woman's character seen from her physical appearance.

c. Struggle of Affection

The third form of gender struggle experienced by Lily Bart is the struggle for attention. As stated by Dillow and Fromm in the second chapter that attention is one of the determinants of a woman to gain affection for the people around her. The first discovered the form of Lily Bart's struggle for attention when she visited Selden,

"For your never coming." She leaned forward with a shade of perplexity in her charming eyes. **"I wish I knew—I wish I could make you out. Of course I know there are men who don't like me—one can tell that at a glance. And there are others who are afraid of me: they think I want to marry them."** She smiled up at him frankly.

"But I don't think you dislike me—and you can't possibly think I want to marry you." (9)

The quotation above is a form of Lily's presumption to Selden who thought that Selden did not think that Selden liked or paid attention to Lily. Selden basically became interested in Lily because of her naivete and beauty. It is unfortunate Lily did not pay more attention to Selden when visiting his house by saying "For your never coming." and "But I don't think you like me — and you can't possibly think I want to marry you." Which makes Selden think Lily does not like him and only focuses on finding rich men and getting his attention. Selden is basically a man respectable and well-off, but Selden thinks that Lily does not pay attention to Selden while on the other hand Selden actually always looks at Lily and even starts to like her.

d. Struggle of Love

The last gender struggle that researcher found in Lily Bart's character was the struggle for love. Lily is instinctively described as a woman who seeks success for wealth throughout the story, but it is clear that Lily still needs love. Because basically humans need love and affection. This is why this struggle has a relationship with the struggle to get affection. Lily's character clearly recognizes that she needs a rich partner, but besides that Lily also needs love and compassion from her partner.

"Dear Mr. Selden, that wasn't worthy of you. It's stupid of you to make love to me, and it isn't like you to be stupid." (9)

The quotation above is Lily's expression when she visits Selden's residence. Lily reveals to Selden openly that she was a woman who had expensive and luxurious desires. On the other hand Selden is a young lawyer and quite successful, unconsciously attracted to Lily Bart. Lily herself indeed considers Selden someone quite special because Lily openly expresses her feelings and ambitions.

2. Character Development in *The House of Mirth*

After analyzing several gender struggles in the character of Lily Bart in the novel, the research will be analyzed how the gender struggle was shown to Lily Bart by using the theory of character development. In this analysis, the researcher examined how the gender struggle that had been studied previously influenced Lily Bart's character in her character development and divided every data with all character development phase. The analysis is presented below,

a. Character Development from Affection

The initial phase in the development of Lily Bart's character can be seen in the quote below where Lily tries to explain her goals to Selden. The first form of character development that researcher found in Lily Bart's character was one influenced by the gender struggle for affection. As a woman, it's clear that Lily revealed that she needed the attention of her closest people and needed friends who understood her about her ambitions.

“You don’t know how much I need such a friend,” she said. “My aunt is full of copy-book axioms, but they were all meant to apply to conduct in the earlyfifties. I always feel that to live up to them would include wearing book-muslin with gigot sleeves. And the other women—my best friends—well, they use me or abuse me; but they don’t care a straw what happens to me. I’ve been about too long—people are getting tired of me; they are beginning to say I ought to marry.” (10)

In the data above, Lily tells Selden that Lily needs a friend to understand. Lily is indirectly portrayed as a character who only focuses on pursuing success. Lily is also considered by the people around her to be a spoiled and indifferent woman to others because Lily is too proud of her beauty and position. Lily always hears things she does not want to hear about herself. That is why as a woman who needs attention Lily tries to find friends who can understand her.

b. Character Development from Fact of Life

The second form of character development that the researcher found in Lily Bart's character is the development of character from the fact of life. As explained in the theory section, the fact of life is a type of struggle that focuses on the desire to achieve ambition or other goals above the basic human needs. In this phase, Lily's character has entered the second phase because at this stage Lily develops to understand the main conflicts she faces in the story.

Lily sighed more deeply. **“I sometimes think,” she murmured, “that men understand a woman’s motives better than other women do.”** (92)

The view of men is how she thinks about how men understand women better than themselves. Lily's opinion explains how she learns about men compared to the beginning of the story where she considers men to be just people who want good women for them. She realized that every woman has a motive and from this a man can convince her choice. This relates to understanding the moral value of a person about the motives and desires of humans.

c. Character Development from Dream

The next form of character development experienced by Lily Bart is the development of character in the struggle for dreams. Dreams have a meaning that is

simply a goal, ambition, desire, and will. Lily understands that even though she is beautiful and young, that is not something that will continue to bring her to her ultimate goal, success in wealth. The character development is the awareness and development of Lily who realizes that her dream doesn't come true is starting to make her degenerate and understands the meaning of horror and horrible things.

“No—no; don’t be quiet; talk to me—keep me awake! I don’t sleep at night, and in the afternoon a dreadful drowsiness creeps over me.”

“You don’t sleep at night? Since when?”

“I don’t know—I can’t remember.” She rose and put the empty cup on the tea-tray. “Another, and stronger, please; if I don’t keep awake now I shall see horrors tonight—perfect horrors!...” (293)

In the data above, Lily feels that the ambition she has achieved has faded and vanished due to her own actions. Lily's development at this time depicted that Lily was like a woman who was paranoid about what would happen to her. Lily assumed that if she slept she would experience horror so she intends to stay awake. Lily develops from a cheerful character who thinks about ambition and after she fails Lily turns into a character who seems irrationally anxious because her ambition is not achieved. In the data above, this is part of the second phase, namely the part of the midpoint that explains the changes in Lily's character for the actions she takes to find her goal ending in failure.

d. Character Development from Love

The last character development that Lily Bart experienced that researchers have discovered is a development in love. In this case, as explained by Fromm in Theory section, love is no longer a human attitude to be able to feel something from other people but more in an emotional direction (see Theory). As shown below is one of the quotes about Lily's view of love,

“Dear Mr. Selden, that wasn’t worthy of you. It’s stupid of you to make love to me, and it isn’t like you to be stupid.” (9)

In the above quote, Lily directly tells how her character understands the meaning of love. Lily can be said to be a naïve woman who does not understand the meaning of love as part of an emotion. At this stage it can be said that all the starting points are how the character of Lily slowly develops understanding the meaning of love. Due to the struggle to find success for wealth, Lily is described as a beautiful woman who thinks love is not an important thing compared to wealth. Because for Lily her ambition is to be rich and have a prominent position.

3. Discussions

This section presents a discussion based on the findings of the study. This research focuses on how the character Lily Bart as the main female character in the novel faces and shows the gender struggles in the story. It has been discovered that there is gender struggles that Lily Bart character experienced as a young girl in the struggle for love, dreams, facts of life, and affection. In this case, the gender struggle experienced by Lily Bart can also be seen from several other characters such as Selden, Rosedale, and Gerty. As for the findings, this research has found that Lily Bart also clearly demonstrated the gender struggle she experienced as a woman of desire. Therefore, Lily Bart's struggle can also be seen from male characters

perspective like Rosedale and Selden who acknowledge Lily's struggle. More than that, Lily Bart's identity as a female character that has luxury and looks beautiful does not make Lily Bart's case in struggle easy. This is because Lily Bart is still a woman, moreover she experiences exploitation, manipulation, distrust and constraints regarding her situation.

Furthermore, gender struggle can also be seen from the perspective of men as one proof of recognition of Lily Bart's struggle. First, it is Selden Lawrance, he is one of the most important characters in the novel. As a beautiful woman, Selden is attracted to Lily at her beginning of the story. Selden and Lily were close enough that Lily explained her biggest wants and ambitions to Selden. In this case, Selden becomes the first male character to know and acknowledge Lily's struggle for success. At the beginning of the story, Selden had seen enough of Lily's struggles in dreams, love and affection. Second, it is Gus Trenor, a wealthy Jewish man who has been doing a lot of trouble and trying to manipulate Lily. Gus is a character who tries to trick Lily into following Gus's wishes and becoming his woman.

Based on the findings, in this research found that out of the four gender struggles experienced by the character Lily Bart, the struggle for facts of life and love is the most significant and the most frequent. The struggle in the facts of life often occurs because of social contact in Lily Bart's environment. Furthermore, there is a struggle for the fact that life is explaining how humans survive in everyday life with their abilities and limitations to face these struggles. It can be seen from the beauty that Lily is her main "ability" to survive in her environment, while her naivety, inexperience, and ambition are things that refer to her limitations. Meanwhile, the struggle for love is what burdens Lily in finding the meaning of true love among the men she meets. Furthermore, this research also found that there was character development experienced by the character of Lily Bart in the story. In this case, it was found that the most influential data present were character developments in terms of life, affection, and dreams. The character's development of the facts of life appears throughout the story after Lily Bart understands what she capabilities. Lily's character development of affection begins to show when she tries to want a friend who can understand her which she tries to show Selden to get her sympathy.

E. CONCLUSION

After analyzing the gender struggle shown by the main female character Lily Bart in the Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* novel using feminism theory which focuses on gender struggles and evidence of character development, this research concludes that the gender struggle experienced and demonstrated by the character Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* novel are a struggle for dreams, affection, love, and the facts of life. This is all shown through Lily Bart's explanation and how the other characters reaction admit it, and respond to it. Therefore, these characters are Selden Lawrance, Simon Rosedale, Gerty Farish, Gus Trenor, and other supporting characters.

Furthermore, this research also found that the development of Lily Bart's character was influenced by several actions she took in her struggle for dreams, love, affection, and the facts of life. This can be seen from the actions, situations, and

words seen in the character of Lily Bart who slowly began to differ from the beginning.

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