FEMALE SURVIVORS IN THOMAS HARDY’S THE WITHERED ARM

Yulistiyanti
Faculty of language and cultural studies
Stikubank University
Semarang, Indonesia
yuliztiyanti@yahoo.co.id

Abstract
This article discusses women position in society that Thomas Hardy portrays in his short story entitled The Withered Arm. This short story tells about two female character have close-relationship to the same man. The man comes from upper class. The first woman from lower class has a son of his, but they do not live together. Then, the second one is his new young wife. This short story takes rural area, Dorset as the setting of place where the society has intimate relationships and setting of time is in Victorian era. It applied feminism theory that focuses on male and female positions in society. Beauvoir (1949) considered that the male in French and Western societies defines what it means to be human and what it means to be female. The female becomes subordinate to the male. It applies qualitative analysis method. The text is analyzed relating to the female characters’ position in society. Their positions make them get discrimination which society created. Thomas Hardy’s short story will be analyzed on discrimination to female characters. The data shows that the two female characters are oppressed on their conditions. Although they do not get physical harassment, the oppression comes from social injustice that women do not get equal benefit and opportunities. Both of them survive to obtain what they need. These characters use their ways as the survivors because of unfair condition.

Keywords: The Withered Arm, survivor, women oppression

Introduction
Literary works have reciprocal relation to society. The works may influence society, vice versa. What an author wrote reflects society’s condition that usually it relates to the time and place written on it. Social conventions, historically and culturally determined, are fundamental for the comprehension of cognitive paradigms at work in society. Furthermore these social conventions are reflected in the ideology and plot structure of narratives, characteristic of a certain society. On the other hand, society imitates what happens described in. The works may inspire their action such as revolt and rebellion. There are many social problems inspiring society to change the condition; such as slavery, love, and oppression.

One of social problems often inspires authors relates to woman oppression. It describes what woman experiences whether in domestic area or in public area. They often get the problem which is caused by social construct. This social construct lays women on insignificant position. They hold some predicates such as meek, humble, and submissive.

Women should survive in this condition. They try to keep alive in this unfortunate condition. As Kelly suggested cited in Walby (1991:146)…the term ‘victim’ gives misleading impression of women as passive recipients of male violence, and prefer to stress women’s survival and the myriad of ways in which they resist.

Thomas Hardy is an author who wrote prose to express his social disagreement. One of his works is The Withered Arm that describes woman condition in Victorian Era. Hardy shows oppression toward women in England. This dependency is created by patriarchal ideology that English people conducted in
19th century. Besides that, Hardy also portrays woman rejection toward this social practice to survive in patriarchal society.

**Methodology**
This research applied qualitative research. It does not need numbers to be analyzed. The subject of the research is a short story text entitled The Withered Arm written by Thomas Hardy. This research focuses on discourse found in the short story.

In conducting the research, the procedures are reading the text, identifying the discourse, interpreting and analyzing the findings. Library research is applied in analyzing the finding. Some sources and references are needed to analyze the discourse in feminism.

**Finding and Discussion**
Thomas Hardy wrote The Withered Arm in 19th century and this short story was first published in 1888. This story takes setting in Dorset, England starting from a large farm that is owned by Mr. Lodge. The Withered Arm tells about a new wife of the farm owner named Gertrude Lodge who gets her arm suffered. This happens after one milk maid of her husband’s farm, Rhoda dreamed. Then she feels guilty after meeting Gertrude. Gertrude tries to cure her arm, but it does not work. One day, she is suggested to touch her arm with the neck of a man who has been hanged. It takes her to a jail where she meets Rhoda and Mr. Lodge who are parents of the man hanged.

In The Withered Arm Thomas Hardy created two female characters; Rhoda and Gertrude that have different characteristics. Both of them get oppression from patriarchal society. This short story reflects that those oppressions happen caused by male domination creation. It is social construct that people conduct in their life. This causes disadvantages for both female characters because they always are compared to men.

Woman and man condition in society is in binary relation. This condition puts women in discriminated. Men hold superiority while women are inferior. On the one hand it puts men in transcendence that means they are independent, but on the other hand women are immanence. Women cannot stand on themselves, they need other (men) (Beauvoir; 2011:215-217). This situation makes women non-significant creatures. The Withered Arm underlines marital relationship that women experience inconvenient condition. Physical appearance, economic autonomy and authority are problems found in the short story.

The non-significance of both female characters can be found from how female characters view on physical appearance. Physical appearance is important for women, especially being beautiful and attractive. Women do not see their body from their own opinion, but they are driven by men’s opinion. As Beauvoir wrote that the representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth (2011:196). One female character of Hardy’s The Withered Arm, Gertrude has opinion that woman should satisfy her husband from physical appearance. She knows that man looks woman from her appearance. ‘I shouldn’t so much mind it,’ said the younger, with hesitation, ‘if—if I hadn’t a notion that it makes my husband—dislike me—no, love me less. Men think so much of personal appearance.’ (49) ‘Some do—he for one.’ Gertrude should define herself how to be a woman, but social construct has already shaped her mind set. It makes her desperate when she is not beautiful any more especially for her husband. Refusing the condition is hard for her, although it is not fair by saying it with hesitation. She tries to rebel what society has, but social pressure encourages
her to find position and justification in marriage (2011:439).

Rhoda also thinks the same thing on physical appearance when she heard Mr. Lodge will bring her wife home. It comes out as her jealousy. Her jealousy toward Gertrude she shares to her son to find out Gertrude’s physical appearance. Rhoda compares herself toward another woman as her ex-husband’s wife. It describes that physical appearance is one of men’s consideration to marry a woman. “Yes…You can give her a look, and tell me what’s she’s like, if you do see her…” If she’s dark or fair, and if she’s tall – as tall as I. And if she seems like a woman who has ever worked for a living, or one that has been always well off, and has never done anything, and shows marks of the lady on her, as I expect she do.’ (42). Social construct has influenced her to judge others from their physical appearance especially women that have relationship to men. As Beauvoir stated, ‘the supreme necessity for woman is to charm a masculine heart; this is the recompense all heroines aspire to, even if they are intrepid, adventuresome; and only their beauty is asked of them in most cases (2011:353).

Besides, men show their masculinity in many ways. One of them is in economic autonomy that may cause them tyrant (2011:574). Mr. Lodge shows Gertrude what he has that means power of his. ‘Now, then, another mile and I shall be able to show you our house in the distance–if it is not too dark before we get there.’ (44). His property is really important for men because men can subjugate women from it. Women do not have the same opportunity as men so that they may not get the same power. This situation causes women hypocrite, they say different from what they do behind the men.

The hypocrisy that Gertrude experiences is her way to gain her position in marriage. When Lodge asks her to destroy her stuffs to cure her arm, she obediently does it. “She obediently destroyed her nostrums and charms; but there remained a hankering wish to try something else-some other sort of cure altogether.’ (54). But, she tries to find other ways to cure her arm that is getting worse because she does not want to lose him. This description is relevant to what Beauvoir notes that possessing economic autonomy and holds appears to be tyrant that gives impact for women to revolt and behave dishonestly. Holding property has big impact in relationship whether on the holder or others. It gives advantages for the holder because property is power for them. In The Withered Arm, Gertrude cannot decide what she wants and needs to do by herself. She is a dependent woman and it causes her hypocritical toward her husband. She obeys what he asks because only her husband helps her economic.

Gertrude’s condition is different from Rhoda. Hardy created Rhoda as a single mother who raises her son by milking cows in Lodge’s farm, her son’s father. Her life is not dependent on men after having a son. She is a woman who Beauvoir suggested that she dares to live by herself. Refusing property from her son’s father proves that she does not want to be bound with male authority. ‘It was then found that he had bequeathed the whole of his not inconsiderable property…subject to the payment of a small annuity to Rhoda Brook…but eventually she reappeared in her old parish, - absolutely refusing, however, to have anything to do with the provision made for her.’ (63). Her act depicts she survives in her own way. She does not sacrifice her principle to live conveniently in materialism.

Property creating tyrant for the holder and revolt is also found in The Withered Arm. Lodge masculinity causes Rhoda irritated and hurt. ‘For though this pretty young woman had rendered impossible any reparation which Lodge might have made Rhoda for his past conduct, everything like resentment at the unconscious usurpation had quite passed
away from the elder’s mind. ‘(50). As tyrants, men take control women especially wife that makes women revolt to their acts. Rhoda revolts by leaving her husband and living with her son from her own earning. Lodge still acts tyrannically by not supporting them. He never gives money for their daily life.

Working outside is one of woman emancipation. Emancipation through working gives women space economic and political freedom. Earning money makes women satisfied as they do not need to fulfill their own need in marital community, because father or husband also supports their need. They bring extra-money home (2011:166). Rhoda works as a milk-maid in Lodge’s farm, but she needs to support their life. The money she earns is also not extra-money, because there is no father or husband who helps them in fulfilling the needs. In this case, Rhoda has not got economic freedom yet because she still lives in poor condition. But, politically she gains her freedom. She is responsible for her own life, there are no persons especially Lodge controls her life any more.

The Withered Arm reveals women condition in England in Victorian era that women had social, legal, and political constraints. Two female characters reflect the impacts of the constraints in their lives. Hardy does not depict the causes of desperate lives that Rhoda and Gertrude experience, but the narrative shows what the society believes as their ideology. Although, this narrative tells superstition and supernatural power, it is Hardy’s way to avoid the domestic, and essentially bourgeois ideology of social realism (Hazarika; 2014:41). Hardy wrote what English society practiced implicitly. Rhoda is described in poor condition with her illegitimate son of Lodge’s. This part plays big role in driving Rhoda’s life. On the other hand, Hardy depicts Gertrude middle class society that her economic condition is different from Rhoda’s. But, Hardy ends her life in tragic condition. Gertrude described dies in the end.

Conclusions
The Withered Arm is a short story written by an English author, Thomas Hardy. He describes women condition in England in the 19th century. He criticizes social problems that cause women ruin and disadvantage. This short story uses setting that patriarchal practices conduct in the society. Those practices reveal marital problem that men and women involve.

Hardy creates two female characters; Gertrude and Rhoda Brook that have different characteristics. They also experience oppression from social construct that discriminate women so that they have no chance to live better. Comparing Gertrude and Rhoda in The Withered Arm is Hardy’s description for women how to overcome oppressive life. They live in the same place, but having different background.

Gertrude is depicted as tragic heroine that her life ends of sufferings. She fails survive in gaining her happiness in marriage, because she always thinks of physical appearance that gets worse. She believes in attractive appearance is important for women. Although Rhoda also has the same opinion on physical appearance, she lives much more freedom than Gertrude. Rhoda does not want her life to be interfered by man. She sets free herself by fulfilling her needs. It is one of ways to release from male authority.

References
Hardy, Thomas. (1896). The Withered Arm.
Kaushik, Hazarika. (2014). The Supernatural and the Fantastic in Thomas Hardy’ The
|---|---|