



BENEVOLENT SEXISM AND WOMEN AGENCY IN PLAY *DIVING FOR PEARLS (2012) BY KATHERINE THOMSON*

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of a novel written by Katherine Thomson entitled *Diving for Pearls (2012)*. This analysis looks at benevolent sexism that is experienced by women who are victims of benevolent sexism acts. And also shows the actions of women's agency carried out by women to get out of the limited space they receive in their environment and also to be able to change their lives for the better. This analysis related to the feminist approach and the concept of benevolent sexism by Glick and Fiske and women agency by Buttler. The aim of this analysis is to what extent the character, conflict (plot), setting and stage direction contribute to reveal the issue of benevolent sexism and women agency. This analysis also depends a lot on the narrator to determine which parts of the novel are used as the data. The result of the study shows that the woman experienced benevolent sexism such as always being considered weak, unable to take responsibility for herself, unable to protect herself and must always be protected, and not solving her own problems. However, Barbara shows the desire and belief that she has rights and is able to change her life for the better with her own abilities.

Key words: Benevolent sexism, gender, discrimination, women, agency

A. INTRODUCTION

As a country that has gone through a period of reform for approximately three decades and has had a good impact on the country's economy, it can bring Australia out of international economy problems. However, in fact Australia still has problems regarding the economy on a national scale. Not only does it still have economic problems on a national scale, Australia also still has problems related to gender equality. This is partly due to the development of a patriarchal culture in society. According to Bressler (2007) patriarchy is a system that considers women as "property" and men as humans. In addition, Bressler (2007) also argues that patriarchy is a social system that places men as the main central authority figure in social organizations. Meanwhile, According to Bhasin (2010) patriarchy is a system of domination and superiority of men over women. This of course causes many people to think that the degree of women is below men. Indirectly, this action certainly has hurt and demeaned the existence of women.

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This act of demeaning women is not only accepted by women in a clear and direct manner, but this action can also be accepted by women in an unclear or less controversial manner and seems to be seen as a positive thing. This action is usually called benevolent sexism.

Benevolent sexism is a term that comes from the word sexism. According to Netra (2009) sexism is a view that positions men in a higher or superior place, while women are positioned in a lower or inferior place within the marginal line, always being harassed and cornered. Meanwhile, according to Walter (2013) in her book, *Living Dolls: The Return Of Sexism*, sexism is discrimination against other people based on their gender, mostly women. This action contains various assumptions and actions that men use to dominate and hate women.

Glick and Fiske (1996) emphasize that the definition of sexism generally emphasizes two components, namely hostility towards women's environments that have been influenced by negative stereotypes and traditional views on gender roles. This traditional view causes women to have limitations in their space of movement. This is because society wants women to remain in their place, whose position should not exceed that of men.

Glick and Fiske (1996) also divide this sexism into two parts in their theory entitled ambivalent sexism, namely hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is the act of men confirming that they have more power than women and exploiting women as sexual objects. Meanwhile, benevolent sexism is a better and gentler justification for male domination. Men will use their power to protect and give love to women. The concept of benevolent sexism was developed by Glick and Fiske (1996) based on the existence of dyadic power which means that women cannot live without the presence of men. This certainly causes the emergence of the assumption that there is a dependency relationship between men and women that supports the extreme perspective of sexism.

In various perspectives, the party most disadvantaged in this act of benevolent sexism is women. Men can be harmed but not directly. This is because men have more power and status in most cultures. Syed (2001) stated:

"Women have always been seen as belonging to men. Only men are considered as beings who have wisdom. Women are considered unwise. Therefore, people think women should be monitored by men. Discrimination is still visible today. Women are not allowed to build their own identity. Women are always seen as children or wives of a man. So, their autonomy is taken away."

Besides always having a position that is under men, women also have the ability to fight this. Or rather women also have the power to fight for their rights to be more respected and recognized, and more importantly so that they can get out of the limited space given to them. This is usually known as women's agency.

According to Mahmood (2002) agency is an act that explores the ways in

which women consciously cultivate themselves to become worthy and honorable women, including strategies towards symbolic violence, such as women's responses to inappropriate speech and gestures. Meanwhile, according to Buttler (2000) women's agency is a record of their capacity for individual choice and action. This means that women's agency can be interpreted as the ability and awareness of women in identifying and making choices in a problem that occurs. This is triggered by the fact that throughout human history, women have been subordinated to men in different ways and at different levels at different times and places. This tends to make women accept a lower social position. Agency can take the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance and the more intangible cognitive processes of reflection and analysis (Kabeer 1999: 438).

This problem is exposed in the play *Diving for Pearls* (2012) by Katherine Thomson. The play shows the life of a woman named Barbara who is a mother of a daughter with special needs who lives during the economic crisis in Australia. Barbara is a woman who has worked hard all her life. But the economic crisis put her in a very difficult life. In addition to getting into trouble in terms of work, Barbara is also often looked down upon by her environment, including her close friend, Den. Den often demeans and considers Barbara weak because Barbara is a woman. Although Den always looks normal, every word that comes out of Den's mouth always seems to be worrying about Barbara and Den also thinks that he should always protect Barbara because Barbara is a woman who is considered to always be protected. In addition to being often underestimated by her environment and those closest to her, Barbara has a strong belief in herself that she can get out in these difficult situations. Barbara believes she is capable of fighting and can provide a better life for herself and her daughter.

I chose this play *Diving for Pearls* (2012) by Katherine Thomson because it shows how Australia, which is considered to have reached the peak of its glory after going through a three-decade reform period and managed to get out of international economic problems, but in fact there are still many local residents who are experiencing economic hardships. caused by the economic crisis that the government could not handle properly. And even though it is considered a developed country, the thinking of the Australian people cannot be said to be advanced, because they still have problems related to gender equality. And this can be seen through this play. The difficult life of Barbara and her friends proves that Australia has not been able to solve their economic problems. And also, Barbara, who is a woman who is often mistreated and underestimated by people in her environment, proves that they not only have economic problems, but also have problems related to gender equality..

A. RESEARCH METHOD

Research method font is Times New Roman with the size 12 pt. The data analyzed based on theory by Glick and Fiske. According to Glick and Fiske (1996), Sexism has two components, namely hostility towards women's environments that have been influenced by negative stereotypes and hostility

towards women's circles caused by traditional views on gender roles in society. This traditional view of gender roles certainly affects women's freedom to act in society.

B. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Finding

This chapter discussed the issue about benevolent sexism and women agency in play *Diving for Pearls* (2012) by Katherine Thomson. In this analysis, benevolent sexism and women's agency focuses on how the protagonist is treated excessively as if she does not have the ability to do something or deal with something. In addition, this analysis also focuses on how the protagonist struggles and has the belief to be able to change her life and her daughter's life for the better. One of them is by taking courses in the hope of having good skills in order to get a better job. The analysis also relies heavily on third person narrator which narrates how events unfold in the novel as gives a clue to the setting of the events in the novel.

2. Discussion

4.1 Benevolent Sexism

Benevolent sexism is a term that denotes an unfair treatment directed at someone, especially women. This treatment is carried out by men and the community in a gentle and loving manner, but in the end it still shows the subordination of women to men. In addition, women are also considered as someone who cannot protect themselves and must be protected. And also women are considered unable to make decisions for themselves, so men need to help in making decisions so that their lives can be better.

DEN arrives, He has followed her up the hill. Unsure as to whether he should have come. She acknowledge him; she thought he would probably show up.

Well, you won't have a light.

There is the sound of a coal truck and they wait for it to pass.

I thought that was you. Thought that was you at the back of the church.

DEN : Yes. [A nervous smile] So ...

BARBARA : Then I thought it wasn't.

Pause.

I mean I didn't come up here expecting you to follow me. I'm not thirteen. I have been up on this hill without you, you know.

DEN : Just to see how you were. Just to see how you're getting on.

From the statement above, it can be seen that the protagonist just went up the hill to see a dead factory worker'. However, her male friend came as if he wanted to make sure the protagonist was okay after traveling quite a distance to get to the funeral home. Her male friends are also worried about the protagonist's condition and intend to accompany her. However, the protagonist feels that her male friend's actions are really too much, because she is no longer a child who cannot protect herself and must be protected by others. Through the incident above, we can see that the protagonist gets acts of benevolent sexism from her male friend. Her male friend's actions show that he considers the protagonist to be a weak person who cannot protect herself and must be protected.

BARBARA : Oh, have I .. Oh, is thatb what I've got .. You'll laugh at this then. Barbara big mouth. I got a job alright. In at Diamond's this time, sewing up little baby's dingo suits. First bell at eight-fourteen, last bell at four-fourteen. No going to the toilet an hour after morning tea or an hour after lucnh. Whole fucking kit and caboodle. Now you know. And there I am. Brand new life.

DEN : You shouldn't have to work there. Not you.

BARBARA : Eighty-four women there. Why would you I think I'm any different ..

DEN : Wouldn't be too many around like you. At least you haven't given up.

Pause. BARBARA lights a cigarette. DEN has the parcel out of the bag, and gives it to her. She takes it, it has been a long time since someone has given her a present. She does not open it.

From the quotation above, it shows how the protagonist's male friend suggests that the protagonist stop working from the factory. It also shows that her male friends think that the protagonist is incapable of doing heavy factory work. He also thinks that the protagonist is not the same as other factory workers who are capable of doing the job. This proves that her male friends think the protagonist is a weak person who can't do heavy work. The worry shown by her male friend is indirectly an act of looking down on the protagonist, which means that the protagonist gets another act of benevolent sexism from her male friend.

In addition to considering women as physically weak so they cannot do heavy work, sometimes the environment also considers women not to have smart

thoughts so they cannot find solutions to problems so that men feel they have to help these women. It can be seen in the quotation below:

BARBARA : Listen carefully. There's no room here, Verge. For you to move here it would have had to be planned. Well in advance.

VERGE strokes BARBARA's face.

VERGE : I love you.

BARBARA : They let them watch too much television, that much is obvious.

Pause.

I love you, but you can't stay.

Silence, VERGE begins to inch her bags into the room. BARBARA takes off her heels.

DEN : We'll find some room for you.

BARBARA : No ! This is a crucial stage in my life.

VERGE runs into the living room and sets down her bags.

From the quotation above it can be seen that the protagonist's male friend wants to help the protagonist find a place to live for herself and her daughter. Through the help given by her male friend, it shows that he thinks that the protagonist cannot solve her problems on her own. This also proves that men still think that women cannot live alone. They need men to protect and help them in solving the problem. In addition, the quote above also shows that men still think women do not have critical minds and are not smart so they need to be helped in any way, including thinking about finding solutions to their problems.

DEN : I know I shouldn't have, but I did go by the ...

BARBARA : You can say it. The boarding house

DEN : The boarding house. The landly said you'd moved.

BARBARA : No, Still there. Take a lot to get me out of Buena Vista.

DEN : You can't expect things to happen all at once.

BARBARA : I do. Why shouldn't I .

DEN smiles.

DEN : I thought about you a lot.

BARBARA : Well, that's right. You're a thinker.

DEN : Me. I am ..

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Den is too worried for the protagonist because the protagonist has not moved from her old place of residence. This also shows that Den thinks that the protagonist is a person who is unable to protect herself so that Den keeps thinking about her fearing that something bad will happen to the protagonist. Through this, it can be proven that men still have the idea that women are weak creatures who cannot take care of themselves and must always be protected. Through this quote, it can also prove that men still think that women are weak creatures and are very different from men who are strong creatures who can protect themselves and the women around them. The worry directed by the man roughly looks like a concern and affection, but behind it there is an act of degrading the ability of women to protect themselves and their lives.

4.2 Women Agency

Women agency is an action when women realize that they have the ability and right to fight the discrimination they get and also, they can fight for their right to be more respected and recognized. This also shows that women can get out of the limited space they receive, as they have confidence that they are able to protect themselves and can change their lives for the better. In addition, they also realize that they are not weak creatures, they have the right to get everything that can support their lives for the better, just as they also have the right to get an education so they can get a better job. And also, they have the awareness that education is one thing that will be able to change their lives in the future.

DEN : I thought about you a lot.

BAR : Me. I am ..

Slight pause. BARBARA starts to go.

I did start those classes. Wanted you to know.

BARBARA : Well, you had to. Can't be an unskilled labourer all your life.

Through the quote above, it can be seen that the protagonist says that she cannot become an unskilled factory worker for the rest of her life. Through these

words, it shows that the protagonist realizes and has confidence that she has the right and opportunity to change her life for the better. The protagonist also takes several classes to get the skills she wants in order to get a better job. This also proves that the protagonist also realizes that education is one of the important things to get a better life in the future.

A westerly ... Haven't had one for a while. Blowing off the top of the coalwash. Look, when you think about it, we didn't give this much of a go. If you ever ... needed anything ... it was nice ... seomething to look forward to.

She turns on him.

BARBARA : Look, I saw that coming before. Working your way up to it. Next step the cot, and once you're in that it's very steep climb out.

She is trying to protect her eyes and face. She looks behind him.

How much more of that stuff do they want to dump .. How you can stand living up here I don't know.

DEN : One house all my life, you don't ever think of moving. I mean they'll turn it into a park ...

The quote above shows that apart from having good physical strength, the protagonist also has good thinking and analysis. This shows that women also have intelligence, not as perceived by men and their environment. Through the quote above, it can be seen that the protagonist seems to realize that something bad will happen to them. This proves that the protagonist is a smart woman who can read the situation quickly.

Oh that's terrible. I didn't mean that . Not that way. Oh, God.

Pause.

BARBARA : Good.

Pause.

DEN : Of course you've got a lot of go in you. Something you have to remember.

He fumbles in his bag for the present, unsure as to whether it is an appropriate time to give it.

BARBARA : Oh, have I .. Oh, is thatb what I've got .. You'll laugh at this then. Barbara big mouth. I got a job alright. In at Diamond's this time, sewing up little baby's dingo suits. First

bell at eight-fourteen, last bell at four-fourteen. No going to the toilet an hour after morning tea or an hour after lucnh. Whole fucking kit and caboodle. Now you know. And there I am. Brand new life.

Through the quote above, the protagonist shows some of the work she has. This shows that the protagonist is a very hard worker. Protagonists can do time-consuming work. This proves that women also have a strong physique. In addition, it also shows that the protagonist can take responsibility for her own life. The protagonist is very independent and does not depend on others. The protagonist also has a high spirit and has an awareness that she has full rights over herself and her happiness in life. And also, the protagonist realizes that she has the ability to change her life for the better.

C. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

A play entitled *Diving for Pearls* (2012) by Katherine Thomson reflect the issue about benevolent sexism and women agency. This is analyzed using feminist theory and related with the concept of sexism by Glick and Fiske. This analysis shows how women are always considered weak, must always be helped, cannot solve their own problems and must always be protected.

Through this analysis, we can see that there are still many women who get bad behavior. They are always considered low, weak. Always belittled and considered unable to solve their own problems. And they are also always considered as creatures that must be continuously protected. In addition, through this analysis we can also see that as women we must realize that we have the ability to change lives for the better. They realize they have the right to be respected and recognized. In addition, they also show that they can take responsibility for their own lives. Also, they realize that education is one of the things that can change their lives for the better in the future. In conclusion, although there are still many women who are considered weak and treated inappropriately, but as women we must realize that we have the ability to show we can and we can change lives for the better, one of them is by working taps and realizing that they need education so that their lives can be better.

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