



PROCEEDING AISELT

(Annual International Seminar on English Language Teaching)

Available online at <https://jurnal.untirta.ac.id/index.php/aiselt>

ELT IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: THE BOUNDARIES AND BEYOND

The Portrayal of Women in *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf

Raden Rara Evi Oktaviani Sandhi, Juliasih

Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Abstract

The research discusses about Virginia Woolf's thoughts on the ideal women as portrayed in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. The research is conducted by applying the expressive approach by M.H. Abrams. It aims to explain how Virginia Woolf expresses her thoughts about her ideal women as seen in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The result of this research shows Virginia Woolf's ideal women are the ones who have strong determination and struggle for freedom and equality as portrayed by Clarissa, Sally, Miss Kilman and Elizabeth in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Although in the end of the novel they must tolerate and deal with the patriarchal society in twentieth-century Britain that means they will get less freedom, they still have optimism not to give up and believe that good things will happen.

Keywords: The Expressive Approach; the Ideal Women; Freedom and Equality

Introduction

Mrs. Dalloway is the fourth novel written by a well-known British novelist, Virginia Woolf. The researcher finds out that this novel is interesting because Virginia Woolf portrays women's lives and issues, such as inferiority, inequality, and lack of freedom to live in twentieth-century Britain. Virginia Woolf also shows that women in *Mrs. Dalloway* live under a patriarchal system, and they are still considered the second class in society at that time.

On the other hand, Virginia Woolf attempts to depict women in *Mrs. Dalloway* who have strong awareness and will to change their lives and their needs for equality. Through her female characters in the novel, Virginia Woolf shows that the characters are aware of being inferior in society and want to change their lives to be better. They struggle to obtain equal positions and make lots of effort to be free from restrictions at that time.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the presence of female characters namely Clarissa, Sally, Elizabeth, and Miss Kilman makes the novel also interesting to be analyzed. From their actions and speeches, Virginia Woolf demonstrates how they struggle to obtain freedom as an individual. They are portrayed differently from the other female characters in the novel because they always want to abolish inferiority in society.

In the novel, Virginia Woolf portrays Clarissa as the one who wants to have freedom in a relationship, and Sally is portrayed as the one who dares to break conventional values in society. She lives unconventionally to be free from restrictions that women often receive at that time. Besides that, Virginia Woolf also portrays Miss Kilman who has the ambition to keep working to be more independent to live as an individual. Then, the last character to analyze is Elizabeth. It is through Elizabeth; Virginia Woolf tries to show that there is optimism for the next young generation to live more independently in

the future especially in late twentieth-century Britain. In the novel, Virginia Woolf shows that some professions are more open for women in the next century than in previous centuries.

Through the portrayal of four female characters, Virginia Woolf wants to express that they have a strong willingness to learn, change and develop despite limitations for women in society. From the novel, Virginia Woolf exposes those women who try not to follow all standards that are conformed by society at that time, for example, being the angel in the house because that popular image of women will make them passive and submissive. So, Virginia Woolf also portrays four female characters as the ones who have strong awareness to change their lives even though some of them still face difficulty to escape from a standard that society has expected women to be, and they must deal with it.

Based on the general information about the portrayal of women as seen in *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is interesting for the researcher to observe Virginia Woolf's representation of the ideal women in the novel. Before finding out the characterizations of the ideal women, the researcher discovers more about how Virginia Woolf also sees women's position, especially in twentieth-century Britain.

Theoretical Framework

This research uses the expressive approach by Abrams to analyze the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. In his book entitled *The Mirror and the Lamp*, he defines the expressive approach in this way:

A work of art is essentially the internal made external resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the writer's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind (Abrams, 1953).

The main point in this approach is the relation between the author and the literary work itself. The author expresses his or her feelings, thoughts, opinions, ideas, or imaginations into a literary work. To show some explanations about the creation of the literary works whose reflections of the author's thoughts, a biographical sketch of the author's life is necessary to be observed. It is due to the author's influences from her surrounding that happens at some points in her life which will later be reflected through a literary work.

Methods

The method which is applied in this paper is library research. The primary data of this research are the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* and Virginia Woolf's representation of the ideal women in her novel. The secondary data are taken from online and written materials, such as Journals, *The Mirror and the Lamp* by M.H. Abrams, Virginia Woolf's essay collections, and some other sources to support the analysis.

Before analyzing the novel, close reading is needed to obtain more understanding of the content in the novel. Besides that, the researcher also does some observations about Virginia Woolf's social background and her views about women in her era to learn how she portrays women and her representation of the ideal women in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. The next step is to take the excerpts from

the novel as the primary data to support the analysis. The data are analyzed by using the expressive approach among with descriptive method.

Result And Discussion

Virginia Woolf's Thoughts on the Ideal Women in Mrs. Dalloway

To demonstrate the ideal women based on Virginia Woolf in the novel, the researcher identifies how Woolf expresses her thoughts in her female characters of the novel. There are some points that Woolf wants to show, for example, women's awareness to struggle for equality, freedom to choose their way of life, a chance to explore more abilities, and professional lives.

The Awareness of Women

In Virginia Woolf's essay entitled *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf portrays women in twentieth-century Britain. She shows that there is gender inequality in society at that time. She has already experienced it during her life and struggled for equality and freedom. In her essay, she shares her feminist thoughts and wants to make women aware of being free and independent to live. They cannot keep living being under control and dictated because they deserve to choose what is best to live. Besides that, Virginia Woolf also writes that "... it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry" (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1954). From the sentence, it can be interpreted that Woolf needs room for herself to explore and focus on what she is doing without being much interrupted. In both her essay *A Room of One's Own* and her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, she expresses how women always receive inequality and they need for a change.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf introduces four female characters that have a strong will for individual freedom. Those characters are Sally Seton, Clarissa, Elizabeth, and Miss Kilman. The character Sally is portrayed as a woman who wants to live freely without thinking about how society restricts women while Clarissa appears to be the main character of the novel that is aware of having the feeling of being isolated in society because she is a woman. Therefore, when she gets married, she still wants to have room for herself and some freedom to think and do. Another female character is Elizabeth. She is the daughter of Clarissa. In the novel, she is characterized as a young woman who is quite serious about her life and eager to know about what working life is like. The fourth female character that Woolf has already introduced is Miss Kilman. She is depicted as a woman who realized how hard women have a chance to work and live more independently. However, she does not give up on that situation. She keeps working and following her passion. The representation of those female characters shows they want to change their lives and struggle for their rights as individuals regardless of their gender.

So, through four female characters in the novel, the researcher will show how Virginia Woolf expresses her ideas about her ideal women who have the persistence to change their lives as found

in *Mrs. Dalloway*. To identify its characteristics, the researcher observes how she characterizes and portrays them in her novel.

Individual Freedom in an Unconventional Way

In the era of the twentieth century, the position of women was still considered unequal compared to men in society. Men had more opportunities to live free like they wanted while women did not. Women still had lots of limitations in their lives. They were only allowed to spend their time at home because if they spent more time in public lives, no one would handle the household affairs, which were their full responsibility. The book *Women's Work in East and West: The Dual Burden of Employment and Family Life*, also explains “women are often entirely responsible for all household affairs, including budgeting and expenditure of all kinds. Husbands play little part in the internal life of the household and are often absent from it for a long period” (Stockman, Bonney, & Sheng, 1995). So, there was not much time for women to live a little bit free outside because they were only trusted with their household at home.

Women were still hopeless with the situation that happened in the twentieth century. They had to follow what society expected for being a conventional woman who sacrificed only to domestic life. Through Sally Seton, Virginia Woolf try to portray her female character as the one who refuses to follow such a conventional life. In twentieth-century Britain, the conventional way in which women had to live and behave according to society’s expectations would make women receive lots of restrictions because they did not have any opinions and hardly speak up for what was best to do and live as an individual.

In the novel, Virginia Woolf depicts Sally Seton as a free-spirited woman. She is different from other women because she sounds idealist and the way she thinks is more advanced than most women at that time. From the passage of the novel, “there they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1958). Based on what Sally talks about together with her friend, she is a young woman who has the vision to change the world. She realizes that the world she lives in makes women oppressed and knows that women encounter restrictions from society so she does not want to be one of them. Because of that, she wants to have a free life and live unconventionally. She realizes that conventional life will take her freedom what to do.

Virginia Woolf expresses her dislikes towards conventional society in the twentieth century which enforces what women should be through Sally’s behavior. Sally rebels against conventionality by doing daring behavior, for example, smoking cigars, and some other behaviors, which the society thinks women should not do. In this case, Virginia tries to give a little bit of rebellious characterization in Sally to show her anger towards the pressure and restriction that women often receive in their lives.

In the novel, Sally is portrayed as the one who is fully aware that she will be judged as a bad girl if she keeps on doing her daring behaviors. Sally knows its consequences, but she tries to ignore it. As a woman, she wants to show that women deserve to have individual freedom without any limitations

in their lives. Through Sally, Virginia Woolf also wants to show that even though Sally is labeled as a rebellious woman, she inspires another woman to make an effort to have freedom.

On the other hand, Virginia Woolf portrays Sally to be the one who is attractive in a way that makes another woman feel envied. It is Clarissa who sometimes wants to be like Sally "... dark, large-eyed, with that quality which since she hadn't got it herself, she always envied..." (Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 1958). In this case, Clarissa admires "Sally Seton's extraordinary beauty, and her quality that most English women lack; the quality of saying everything without fear" (Noori, 2012).

Virginia Woolf tries to show some awareness for Clarissa as a friend of Sally that she feels lacks the qualities of Sally who has a strong desire to live freely against the restrictions in society. Clarissa is still in doubt to break the limitation because she is also born to a higher-class family who obliges her to follow conventional life. So, she is expected to become a role model who is considered a good girl by society.

The good girl is rewarded for her behaviour by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture. To her are attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity: she's modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing. At times, she may be sad about the problems of other, and she frequently worries about those in her care – but she is never angry (Tyson, 2006).

The term a good girl makes women submissive and passive in their life. However, when Sally is young, she is portrayed as the one who insists and demands equality. It is not easy for her because she always has to face lots of obstacles against the patriarchal society in the twentieth century. Although dealing with a patriarchal society is not what is wanted, Sally tries to accept it. She is still aware of her feeling of being free; hopes for gender equality will happen in the future.

Individual Freedom in a Relationship

In the novel, Virginia Woolf also depicts Clarissa as a woman who is concerned about the freedom to live her life without being too much dictated. Clarissa has a feeling that if she gets married, she will get less freedom. Virginia Woolf gives two different characteristics in two men namely Peter and Richard that love Clarissa. In the novel, Peter is described to be a judgmental and temperament man while Richard is an uncritical and calm man.

Clarissa appreciates the way Peter loves her. He is passionately in love with her but Clarissa also wants to have individual freedom that Peter never gives her during a relationship. Because of that, Clarissa thinks twice to marry him.

The relationship between Clarissa and Peter starts with love, but it has marked with a sense of tension. Clarissa's soul craves for love and to be loved, but also wants privacy and independence of her own. In her relationship with Peter, her soul underwent a constant tension between love and individual freedom (Shihada, p. 127).

With Richard, Clarissa has more freedom. He understands that Clarissa wants room for herself. Although he gives her freedom, she still spends most of her time at home. It is because she should deal with a patriarchal society that still limits women on what to do and express themselves.

Freedom to Speak Up

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf also portrays Sally Seton as the one who is aware that women deserve to speak up. At that time, most women's rights are often ignored. They also do not have any chance to participate in the public sphere.

In the public sphere, women are still considered second-class citizens whose presence is not as important as men. Inequality between men and women is seen through the conversation between Sally Seton and a man Hugh Whitbread in the novel. They once argued about votes. Hugh feels women like Sally do not deserve to have voted. Women's position in the public sphere, especially in politics that is considered inferior, and their voices are still not heard. He thinks that women are better to stay at home than spending time in public life that is not their place.

Through his reactions, it shows that women receive lots of limitations to have a choice and choose what is best to do as an individual. In this case, Virginia Woolf also shows that women are still voiceless and unequal in society. The representation of Sally in the novel shows that she is a woman who wants to speak up and have the right to vote yet is powerless simply because she is a woman.

Freedom to Have Professions

After discussing the characters Clarissa and Sally Seton, the researcher will discuss other female characters Elizabeth and Miss Kilman. In the novel, Virginia Woolf depicts Elizabeth as a young woman who has an interest to work. Elizabeth is aware of the importance of working since her teacher introduces her to work. Virginia Woolf creates a character for Miss Kilman to be Elizabeth's teacher because "she is very able and she also has a historical mind" (Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 1958). So, she is trusted to be a history tutor.

In the novel, Miss Kilman is the only one who has an educational background and working as a teacher. Through another statement that Miss Killman also states in the novel, "every profession is open to the women of your generation" (Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 1958). According to the way Miss Kilman says in the novel, it expresses some points of view that Virginia Woolf wants to show it is important to pursue education and have a profession for women.

As a tutor, Miss Kilman shares her knowledge with her students including Elizabeth. Besides that, she also presents lots of new ideas and better lives for women if they have a profession(s). Therefore, Elizabeth is eager to learn and know more about professional life.

As a young generation, Elizabeth shows some new vibe. In the novel, she is characterized as the one who wants to be an independent woman and also wants to fulfill what she needs. Through the character Elizabeth, Virginia Woolf also predicts that in the late twentieth century there will be a new hope and optimism for women. Besides that, Elizabeth is also illustrated as the one who is eager for knowledge. It means that Virginia Woolf shows women have to change and be the ones who are keen to learn through the characters in the novel.

In Mrs. Dalloway, Miss Kilman is the influential figure for Elizabeth because she encourages Elizabeth to keep studying and begin to think about which professions she will have in the future. Miss Kilman does not want to see Elizabeth being trapped into inferiority like most women in her era. So, she always emphasizes that education and professions are important for women to be intellectual and independent.

As an old generation, Miss Kilman has already experienced how hard it was for women to have proper educations and jobs. In the previous era, there was no equal opportunity between men and women in the public sphere. The public sphere was still considered a men's world.

Working in workplaces is like a dream for women because women still feel more inferior with the fact that they will earn less money than men. It can be inferred that they are considered second class in society. Virginia Woolf also shows it through Miss Kilman who has worked hard but she cannot afford to buy good clothes. Although Miss Kilman has not gotten financial freedom yet, she keeps struggling and achieving her goal to have a profession to live independently as an individual. She is still optimistic that her life will be much better as soon as possible if she does not give up. From the passage "she had her degree. She was a woman who had made her way in the world. Her knowledge of modern history was more than respectable" (Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 1958), Virginia Woolf portrays Miss Kilman as the one who cares about education. This female character believes that having good education and profession will give her way out.

In the novel, Miss Kilman expresses her happiness to know the fact that Elizabeth is different from women in her era. She shows optimism and she has a passion for work. That is why Miss Kilman likes to share her experience and knowledge with her because she is welcomed for that. She also hopes that Elizabeth will follow in her footsteps to work and live independently. Therefore, she persuades Elizabeth to think about her future and pursue her dream to be a better generation in the future.

In comparison, today in the twenty-first-century women's lives are much better than in the past. Women have already achieved equality; most professions are open for women. They are allowed to join in workplaces such as politics, medical institutions, entrepreneurship, and many more. So, it shows that there is a significant change in women's lives today.

Virginia Woolf's Characterization of the Ideal Women

As can be seen from Virginia Woolf's portrayal of four female characters previously, it shows that women should have a strong determination if they want to change their lives. By having strong determination, women will abolish inferiority and the restriction that they often receive in society.

Through Sally and Clarissa, Virginia Woolf shows their awareness to break the patriarchal expectation. They want to have the freedom to do without being controlled and oppressed. That is the reason why both struggle for their rights to have equality and freedom. However, they have to face many obstacles. When they are young, they are very idealists but later they still must deal with conventional life and patriarchal forces in society.

On the other hand, Virginia Woolf also shows there is strong awareness in her two female characters Elizabeth and Miss Kilman. She portrays them as the ones who want to pursue higher education and professional life. Through Miss Kilman, she is characterized as an old generation who has already experienced lots of hard life to live in the late nineteenth until the twentieth century, but she always tries to get up and remind herself not to give up. As a woman, she realizes that if she does not change, she will be trapped in a patriarchal system that makes her become a submissive woman. Therefore, she tries to live more independently by working as a tutor. Then, the next character is Elizabeth. Through Elizabeth, she is characterized as a young generation who is keen to learn. She is interested to know about working and professional life.

Elizabeth in this novel becomes the symbol of a new woman who has the spirit to live independently and become a carrier woman in the future. Elizabeth is also portrayed as the one who is aware that marrying a rich man is not the only way to achieve social status in society but working and having financial freedom are the best way to do. Additionally, Virginia Woolf hopes that there will be a big change for women in the late twentieth century if women keep struggling for equality and freedom. The change gives them more opportunities to be free from their restriction. Therefore, Virginia Woolf tries to encourage young women through the character Elizabeth to have the ambition to pursue their dreams and have better lives by having financial and intellectual freedom.

As seen from her four female characters, Virginia Woolf wants to show even though at the end of the novel her female characters have to deal with the patriarchal system, they still have a belief that they will get better lives as soon as possible. Besides that, Virginia Woolf writes in her novel that women also have toleration even though they do not like the patriarchal system, women still try to accept it and push themselves to be stronger in every situation that they face.

Conclusion

After analyzing Virginia Woolf's women in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, the researcher finds out that Virginia Woolf's representation of the ideal women is the ones who always keep trying to make their lives to be better. They are aware of being inferior in society and they want to change it. The characters Clarissa, Sally, Miss Kilman, and Elizabeth always do lots of effort to get their freedom and equality and their lives in society.

Through Sally, Virginia Woolf wants to show that women can live free by living unconventionally. In the novel, Sally is a free-spirited woman who always wants to do lots of things. She is also portrayed as a smart woman who believes that reading books will make someone more knowledgeable and open-minded. As one of the representations of the ideal woman in the novel, Sally is not always portrayed as a good woman because she appears to be a little bit rebellious. In this case, Virginia Woolf expresses her dislikes towards the patriarchal system through this character by breaking the restrictions on what women should not do.

Through Clarissa, Virginia Woolf wants to show that women also deserve individual freedom in a relationship. It is because, in a traditional relationship in the past, women were easily being controlled. Because of this awareness, in the novel, Clarissa prefers to marry a man who gives her a little bit of freedom even though she does not love him completely than to marry a man whose love is too possessive and makes her life suffocated.

Through Miss Kilman, Virginia Woolf wants to show that she is a woman who never gives up pursuing her passion. In the novel, Virginia Woolf portrays her as the one who has the ambition to work, and also she is the only one who has an educational background. Her knowledge of history is very good so that she is often invited to be a private teacher.

From her three female characters Sally, Clarissa, and Miss Kilman, Virginia Woolf portrays them as old generations who have experienced the ups and downs to struggle for freedom and equality. Three of them realize that they deserve to live in their way and want to be independent. However, Virginia Woolf also shows that her female characters still have to deal with the society in Britain at that time, but it does not mean they give up. They still have a strong desire and determination to have better lives.

On the other hand, Virginia Woolf depicts Elizabeth as a young generation who is expected to be always eager to learn new things and gain more knowledge. At a young age, Elizabeth has already begun to think about professions, and she is also interested to know more about them. Through Elizabeth, Virginia Woolf wants to show how women should be in the future. As seen in the way Virginia Woolf portrays Elizabeth in the novel, it indicates that her representation of the ideal woman is also the ones who want to work and become a career woman to achieve financial freedom.

In short, through her four female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf tries to express her thoughts about her ideal woman. Her portrayal of the ideal woman is different from the societal expectation of the ideal woman at that time. As seen in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf shows that her representation of the ideal women is the ones who have the independence to live and choose their way. However, in the twentieth century, it is still hard to achieve freedom and equality because of the patriarchal system but Virginia Woolf gives some hope and optimism through her character Elizabeth because as a young woman, she has the ambition to pursue her passion.

Bibliography

- Abrams, M. H. (1953). *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Noori, L. S. (2012). Clarissa Dalloway: The Crisis of Identity. *Kirkuk University Journal - Humanity Studies*, 5, 11.
- Shihada, I. M. (n.d.). A Feminist Perspective of Virginia Woolf's Selected Novels: Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse. 127.
- Stockman, N., Bonney, N., & Sheng, X. (1995). *Women's Work in East and West: The Dual Burden of Employment and Family Life*. Routledge.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Woolf, V. (1954). *A Room of One's Own*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, V. (1958). *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: The Hogarth Press.