

ANNIE DE LEEUW'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN JOHANNA REISS' *THE UPSTAIRS ROOM*

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Abstract. This study is about Annie de Leeuw's struggle for freedom in Johanna Reiss' *The Upstairs Room*. Annie de Leeuw and her sister, Sini find themselves separated from their Jewish family during the Second World War. The Germans always look for them because they are Jews. Annie struggles to gain her free living like others by hiding in a Gentile family's small room in upstairs for almost three years. Through the characterization of the main character, this study is analyzed intrinsically. Apart from intrinsic approach, this study also applies extrinsic approach to strengthen the analysis. The extrinsic approach is needed since it also discusses the concept of freedom. Annie de Leeuw gains her freedom when they are finally liberated by Canadian troops. Surviving in hiding for a very long time, Annie has almost lost the ability to walk. She gets her freedom in the end after facing many hard obstacles in her struggle. It is concluded that freedom is an essential need of human being that has to be struggled.

Keywords: *struggle for freedom, freedom, character*

INTRODUCTION

Literary work expresses reflection of human life, that human life substances are revealed through the elements of literature. According to Schmitz (2007) character is basic element in much imaginative literature, and therefore they merit the considerable attention paid to them. Character is used synonymously with the person, human being, and literary figure. More often it is used in reference to individual personal qualities and characteristic. Characterization is the way to develop a character. According to Abrams and Harpam, the author may show not only external speech and actions, but also a character's inner thoughts, feelings, and responsiveness to events; for a highly developed mode of such inner showing (Abrams and Harpam, 2009:43).

Johanna Reiss, a Dutch-born American writer, is the author of *The Upstairs Room*. The novel gives a message that freedom is an essential need of human being and Johanna Reiss tells the idea through the main character of the story. Annie de Leeuw, becomes the main character is actually Reiss' name when she

was born in April, 4th 1932. Born and brought up in Holland, Reiss taught elementary school for several years before coming to the United States to live. *The Upstairs Room* is an autobiographical book which won the Jewish Book Council Juvenile Book Award and the Buxtehuder Bulle, a prestigious German children's book award.

Freedom is essential thing possessed by every human being since he or she comes to the world. There is no one who wants to live under pressure or threat, freedom is human right that could not be bothered by anyone. Everyone is free doing anything and making decision for his or her own life without influence from others. According to Isaiah Berlin (Patterson, 1991) there are two concepts of freedom; they are *freedom to* and *freedom from*. She states that *freedom to* is a concept of freedom that should be prevented. By using this concept, a person considers that he or she is free to do anything to another, included oppression. Besides the statement above, *freedom from* is one of concepts of freedom that Berlin wants and applies. For her, the real freedom is a condition without any

pressure, obstacle, and coercion. Basically, as long as the action of freedom does not disturb anybody else, people can do what they want.

Patterson identifies the seven ideas associated with types of freedom as personal, sovereign, civic, physical, spiritual, national and state freedom (Patterson, 1991). (1) Personal freedom means not being coerced by individuals or governments and having the ability, within acceptable limit, to do as one pleases. (2) Sovereign Freedom is the ability to restrict the personal freedom of other in order to enhance one's own economic or social benefit. (3) Civic Freedom is the capacity of adult member of a community to participate in its life and governance. This concept of freedom implies a political community with clearly defined right and obligation for every citizen. (4) Physical Freedom is the possibility for a person to go where he or she wants and do what he or she wants. (5) Spiritual Freedom is the privilege of being able to express one's thoughts or to live according to one's outlook. (6) National Freedom is the authority which enables a person to identify and to live with other of his or her people. (7) State Freedom is the ability of a person to live (preferably in his or her on land) under a government of his or her choosing.

METHOD

The analysis of struggle for freedom in Johanna Reiss' *The Upstairs Room* is a qualitative study, as it is done with interpretation from the researcher. The data is taken from the novel, Johanna Reiss' *The Upstairs Room*, then the researcher as the instrument gets informations or clues from some references. (cf. Kennedy, 2010). In this case, this study uses references of freedom concept (Patterson, 1991).

DISCUSSION

The discussion elaborates Annie de Leeuw's reasons of struggle and the ways of

Annie's struggle for freedom. Annie de Leeuw, the main character of the story (cf. Baldick, 2008; Schmitz, 2007) is a daughter of Jewish family who live in Winterswijk, Holland. She lives with parents and two older sisters, Rachel and Sini. They live in discomfort during the Second World War more than the others because they are Jews. They try to save their live as hard as they can in order to avoid the concentration camp, where so many Jews are tortured and killed: *I was not very old in 1938, just six, and a little thing. Little enough to fit between the wall and Father's chair, which in those days was always pulled up in front of the radio.* (Reiss, 1972:1)

Annie is just a six year old girl in the beginning who exactly does not understand what is going on. She often hears about Hitler but does not know who he is, why he hates Jews, and why the neighbor and her relatives always come together to talk about their welfare.

Hitler. All the man on the radio ever talked about was Hitler. He must be an important man in Germany. Why didn't he like German Jews? Because he didn't. Why else would he be bothering them. The radio said he did. (Reiss, 1972:1)

For the first time the son of Gans family says that Germans will not bother Dutch Jews, but the fact Germans is contrary. They begin to talk much about forbidding the Jews do many things. The problem that comes early in Annie's family is about her father's job. Jews are no longer allowed to do their business.

I liked what he said. But Hitler must have changed his mind about liking Dutch Jews because in September Father was no longer allowed to do business. He read about it on a big poster that was stuck on a tree in the middle of the marketplace. (Reiss, 1972:8)

The problem does not only appear from father who lost his job but also comes from the maid, Marry. She is a woman who Annie thinks as a sister. She has to leave because of her boyfriend's anxiety about being expelled by the people if she lives with Jews: *"You see, because you're Jewish. And I don't mind, and he doesn't mind. We like Jews, but he's afraid a lot of people won't talk to me anymore if I stay with you. You understand?"* (Reiss, 1972:9)

This is neither easy for Annie nor Sini. After Marie leaves home, Rachel has to take the duties more than ever besides her job as a teacher. Unluckily, the next problem happens to Rachel. She also loses her job after her father. Poor Rachel knows that the school does not understand about this. Germans did.

"I've been fired," Rachel answered.
"As of tomorrow."

"Annie, go out and play," Mother said.

I got as far as the door.

"But I'm not taking it," Rachel cried.

"This letter came from the Germans, not from the school. The school probably doesn't even know about it (Reiss, 1972:9)

Annie is in the fourth grade. Everything is good for a few days before a bad thing happens. On the way after school, some children are waiting for Annie and Sini. They start to mock them. The reason is still same, because they are Jewish.

I had my own problems at school. Willy Bos, my best friend, didn't sit next to me any longer. Her mother had come to school to talk to the teacher.

"Don't cry," Mother said to me, "we like you."

I knew that. But why didn't Willy? Anymore.(Reiss, 1972:9-10)

After a jeer has been done by a group of children, Annie thinks that it is over but it still continues. The bullies are coming back to shoot them with such nasty utterances. Annie and Sini keep walking and then running as if they do not hear them. The bullies do something worse to them instead. They are just not mocking but chasing, hitting and kicking.

How could we pretend nothing was the matter? We were running, weren't we? The others were chasing us, weren't they? When they caught up with us, they sang the song right in our ears. And hit. And kicked. to be chased by Willy Boss! I didn't like her either, not anymore. Why weren't we living in the new house yet?(Reiss, 1972:12)

The obstacles that come to Annie and her family has yanked her freedom and also threatened her safety. This part will discuss about Annie's efforts to get her freedom back where she can live quietly. She wants to go wherever she wants without any threat and danger just like other children. The ways that have been done by Annie and her family starts from building a new house, then hiding in Hannink's house until living with Oostervelds in nearly two years. That is all she does to save her life and obtain her freedom back. (cf. Patterson, 1991).

Germans have made a place for Jews named concentration camps where many Jews will be tortured and killed. It is in Mauthausen. Annie's father has found a way to stay away from the place. He will move to Switzerland. He is going to go there with Phil. Somebody will drive them to the Swiss border. Father convinces her wife that they will send for her after they get to Switzerland. He also says that his wife will get the best doctor there. He absolutely convinces about his idea and will leave soon.

There is another rumor after Annie's father planning for Switzerland. It says that German does not only take the men but women also unless they have any bustles at home. Annie's father suggests his three daughters to start a nursery school at their house so that Germans will not expect them to go to the camps because they will be very busy. Rachel, who once teaches in a nursery school, is capable to run this way. With Sini and Annie as an assistant, she will start the school well. (cf. Lukens, 2006)

Every morning about ten children came on the backs of their mother's bikes. I just waiting for them by the gate, wearing my star, just like mothers. I took the children inside, and Sini showed them where to sit. (Reiss, 1972:23)

There are about ten children come to their new school every day. They come with their mothers. Annie is waiting for them by the gate. She takes them inside and tells them where they have to sit. She does it as a really teacher's assistant. She feels a bit glad to do her duty because she knows that Frits, her best friend, has to go to school as a student while she is an assistant when she is only ten.(cf. Patterson, 1991).

The situation is not getting better because Germans need more people to take to concentration camp. The announcement on tree has informed it as usual. Some parents go to the camp or to a hiding place. It makes children who comes to Rachel's school becomes fewer and fewer. Rachel gets desperate so that she decides to go to the camp too. Her father is getting mad to know about this. He endeavors to protect his beloved family so he will not allow anybody go there. Then, He goes to a farmer, named Abbink to ask some help. Abbink feels so sorry cannot help him but he knows someone who probably can do something for him. He suggests him to see Mr. Hannink for help.

"Come, come, hurry." Now we had a place, too, he said. All three of us would stay in Mr. Hannink's house. Miss Kleinhoonte, Rachel's and Sini's old high school teacher, would plan with Mr. Hannink how we would get to Usselo, where he lived. (Reiss, 1972:32)

Luckily, Mr. Hannink is a good man who will help Mr. de Leeuw by giving him a hiding place for his three daughters. He comes to Annie's house to see her father to talk about the hiding place they have to stay in. After the discussion her father calls his three daughters. He thinks that he is so lucky to get a favor. Mr. Hannink and Miss Kleinhoonte will plan the way they get to the house in Usselo.

After Annie's father leaves home for hiding, Miss Kleinhoonte comes to tell her that her father has arrived safely. She also tells about what they have to do before go to Usselo. They have to change their appearance for safety. Miss Kleinhoonte starts from Annie. She has to cut her hair like a boy so that no one knows her when she is on the way to Mr. Hannink's house: *I was to get a boy's haircut, Miss Kleinhoonte said, and wear a sailor suit. "But I'll look like a boy! What if I see somebody who knows me." That could happen. I sucked in my breath.* (Reiss, 1972:34)

Annie wears a towel around her and Rachel starts to cut her hair. So much hair falls down. She looks into the mirror after Rachel finishes her hair. Her face looks very round and she hates it. She feels better with her long hair. Rachel and Sini praise her by saying how cute she is. But she does not believe it. It makes her annoyed instead. What Annie has done is not a simple thing. Changing appearance to be worse will make most of people lose their confidence, so does Annie. She feels freak in her new style, but she must do it to protect herself. Besides Annie cuts her hair, Sini has to change her appearance too. Rachel is ready with a bottle of peroxide in

her hand. She will change her sister's hair to be light color. Sini is pretty with her long and shiny hair, but the color is black. Black is the wrong color at that time. It signifies a Jew so that she must make it different. Rachel asks Sini to wash her hair first. Then she pours some peroxide in a glass and adds some water. It is poured on Sini's hair and they wait for a little while till her hair begins to turn lifeless red. She looks at it furiously and says that it is awful. (cf. Patterson, 1991).

Annie and Sini have prepared all of things to go to hiding. As Miss Kleinhoonte's instruction, Sini is the first to leave. She goes to the Hanninks by bike. Three hours later Annie leaves home too. She is going to come to the same house where Sini will stay in.

Innocently I looked at him. "Oh—the suitcase? It's full of girls' clothes I'm taking to my aunt." (Reiss, 1972:40)

It is the first time for Annie to go by bus. She sits down in the back of the bus. She puts her suitcase in front of her. She moves as far away from other passengers as she can to avoid questions or suspicions from them. She takes the ticket out of her pocket. She never brings her own ticket before. About half an hour outside of Winterswijk, the bus comes to a sudden halt. Everyone looks outside. Several Dutch soldiers come in, ordering all the passengers open their bags. Annie is getting panic to see her suitcase full of girls' clothes. She does not know how to answer if they ask her, until one of the soldiers comes toward her. Annie tells him that she is going to take the suitcase to her aunt. Fortunately, he nods and goes away. Annie wipes her wet hands that indicate how nervous she is. (cf. Patterson, 1991).

Dini Hannink, a daughter of the Hanninks, picks Annie up when she arrives at Enschede. Dini paddles her bike to her town, Usselo. When she comes to the

Hanninks, Sini has been there. They begin to talk when Mr. and Mrs. Hannink leave the room. It is different with their home. In this house they have to stay in a small room all day and night with no activities. They have been there for two months in drabness until the situation is getting worse. A German soldier follows Mr. Hannink when he takes a Jewish girl to another hiding place. It makes him so worried that he plans taking the girls to a farm nearby. *It was very dark. Several times we tripped. Mr. Hannink took my hand. "You hold on to Sini. Once we're on the road, walking will be easier.* (Reiss, 1972:54)

They go to the new hiding place at night. Mr. Hannink holds their suitcase in his hand. He goes on the road first. It is not easy to walk in the darkness, but they have to do it to reach the house. They tripped for several times, but it is not the reason why Annie feels sad. She is so upset to think how poor she is, being moved from one house to another.

In her first hiding in the Hanninks, she and Sini are placed in a small room in upstairs. It is an unpleasant condition for everyone to be in a small room with so few activities at night and all day long. Sini calls it as 'no life'. In this case, from Patterson's statement (1991) it is concluded that Annie has lost two types of freedom, physical freedom and personal freedom. Living in a small room in upstairs for several years as her hiding place makes her losing physical freedom as she can not go wherever she wants and neither do what she wants. Living subjected by German's rules causes her losing personal freedom.

The chaotic situation brings a bad effect to Annie. She and her sister have to live in hiding with Hannink's family. One night, Mr. Hannink takes them to another hiding place which is like a cave. It smells dank inside there. Mr. Hannink leaves them there for a day because a German soldier has followed him last few days. It makes Annie afraid and anxious when she is in hiding. The Oosterveld, the second

hiding, is a gentle family which is better than the Hanninks. In the Oostervelds they live with Johan, Dientje and Opoe. Just like the previous place, they live for hiding so there are few things to do. It makes Sini feels so bored. Annie and Sini feel so bored being in their room all day long. They want something to read. Sini tries to ask Dientje whether she has any books. Unfortunately, she has none. There is only a Bible in her house. (cf. Patterson, 1991).

Johan and his wife begin to worry about the girls' security in upstairs room. They think of another hiding place that is more safety for Annie and Sini. Finally, he finds a closet in the girls' room that he will change into a shelter. He takes the clothes off the shelf and put them next to him on the floor. Then he lifts out the shelf. He removes the piece of wood that is in back of it. He reconstructs the closet becomes a safe place to hide as he thinks: *Every day we'd have to practice getting in and out, Johan said, until it took us no time. "Not a bad hiding place for a dump farmer, eh?"* (Reiss, 1972:73)

When the hiding place is done, Johan calls the two girls, Dientje and Opoe. He shows his work proudly. He thinks that it will be easy and safe for them to hide in. He asks Annie and Sini to try it. Sini is the first to go into the closet. She sticks her head in, then her shoulders. She moves to the side and leaves another side for Annie. It is not under the ground, like they have ever stayed before.

It was getting cold in the room. Without making any noise, Sini took the lid off the stove. One by one I took coals out of the scuttle and plopped them into the stove. After the tenth coal Sini eased the lid back on. No sense putting in more, the day was almost over. (Reiss, 1972:87)

The room becomes cooler. Sini tries to warm the room by lit the stove. Annie

puts some coals into the stove. The quotation above tells that they live in such unpleasant condition, cold and deserted. Hopefully, Annie wishes that the day will be over soon. The day she means is their hard day when war is going on and they have to live in hiding. (cf. Lukens, 2006).

Dientje has not come upstairs to bring wool that Sini needs. Annie plans to go downstairs and take the wool for Sini. Painstakingly, Annie tries to stand and walk. Her legs are pain because of staying in bad for long time. What Annie has done to get freedom is not an easy thing to do by the children of her age. Her obstinacy and optimistic have made her strong enough to survive in trouble until she can find his purpose, being free in living just like people in general.(cf. Patterson, 1991).

CONCLUSION

From the analysis it is concluded that the main character, Annie de Leeuw is a dynamic character (cf. Abrams& Harpham, 2009). It can be seen from the sequence of events that shows the change of Annie's characterization. In the beginning of story she is just a little girl who is curious and wants to get her family's attention. As far as Annie grows older, she tries to understand what happens to her family. There are so many problems inflicts her Jewish family, starts from her father loses the job, her sleep-in maid decides to leave till the problem that really becomes her own problem. That is when her best friend keeps away from her.

After having so many problems in her family, she becomes fear. Then, she realizes that she has to be optimistic and no longer afraid of the troubles inflicting her Jewish family. It means that Annie is the main character who has development in facing the difficulties to fulfill her wishes about freedom. Annie de Leeuw has to struggle for freedom. She has to struggle for freedom because of troubles that inflict her as the member of Jewish family. It starts

from her father who loses his job, her sister is fired and she is avoided by her best friend until she has to be in the same house with people who want to catch her. Those reasons force Annie to do some efforts that should not be done by children of her age. She must go to Usselo by herself to stay with the Hanninks. After staying with the family, she has to move again to the family of Oostervelds.

From the analysis about losing freedom, Annie has lost her personal and physical freedom. It is said as losing personal freedom because she is always in anxiety from German's threat. She loses the physical freedom because she lives in a small room in upstairs for about three years with so few exercises so that her legs are flawed. (cf. Lukens, 2006) Finally Annie de Leeuw can survive in her freedom. With her struggle and optimistic in facing all the troubles, she can get her free life as she dreams.

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