

OCTAVIA'S FIGHT FOR WOMAN RIGHTS IN ELIZABETH ASTON'S *THE SECOND MRS. DARCY*

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Abstract. Makalah ini melaporkan studi tentang perjuangan seorang tokoh perempuan untuk memperoleh hak kesetaraan. Studi ini membahas perjuangan tokoh utama, seorang perempuan bernama Octavia, dalam novel karya Elizabeth Aston yang berjudul *The Second Mrs Darcy*, dalam mengatasi masalah ketidaksetaraan secara ekonomis, politis, sosial maupun psikologis. Pertanyaan yang diajukan adalah apakah usaha-usaha tokoh perempuan dalam novel *The Second Mrs. Darcy* dalam memperjuangkan hak kesetaraan dengan laki-laki. Penelitian menggunakan metode deskriptif, dengan novel *The Second Mrs. Darcy* sebagai sumber data utama, dengan data berupa kata, frasa dan kalimat dalam novel tersebut. Penelitian ini juga menggunakan pendekatan intrinsik (berfokus pada karakter dan setting) dan ekstrinsik (berfokus pada tradisi dan nilai-nilai dalam struktur sosial yang digambarkan dalam novel). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Aston membahas masalah kedudukan perempuan dan ketidaksetaraan gender khususnya terutama dalam hak di depan hukum dan hak berbicara. Penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perjuangan yang dilakukan oleh tokoh utama Octavia meliputi hak bekerja, hak atas pemilikan harta benda, hak mendapat perlakuan adil dan emansipasi dan hak bicara dan menyampaikan pendapat.

Keywords: *character analysis, fight for woman rights*

INTRODUCTION

The struggle for gender equality has been an interesting topic in the area of social equality, where women can get equal rights with men in the community regardless of gender. Until today most of the women are still active in the struggle for equal rights with men, or commonly known as gender equality. Lois Tyson (2006:83), states that in a society dominated by men, women are often oppressed economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. Gender equality is the removal of discrimination and structural inequality, thus creating equality between the rights of men and women in all fields as in political, legal, social, cultural, educational, and so on. So that women can be free to speak up or give opinion.

The present study aims at investigating the issue of gender inequality and the fight for woman rights through a character in a novel by Elizabeth Aston entitled *The Second Mrs. Darcy*. Elizabeth Aston is the author of the

novel from Chile who tried to expose the problems faced by women in the novel *The Second Mrs. Darcy*, especially on the issue of gender equality where women are considered subordinate to men. The novel tells about Octavia, one of the main characters in the story. She is the daughter of a second wife long-deceased, Mrs. Melbury whose half siblings have always bullied her because her mother is a woman they consider beneath them. Octavia is described as an honest, outspoken, headstrong, bold and intelligent woman. When she is twenty five and recently widowed, she decides to become an independent woman. Octavia refuses the idea that a woman has to get married in order to survive in her social circle. Octavia has strong will to defend anything that she considers true. She will fight the tradition or rule which she considers wrong and also runs something carefully to look for ahead of time about the truth. She wants to show that a woman also has equal ability to men in all fields.

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Studies of gender and woman roles in Victorian Age have shown that in this period, marriage was one of the most important points in the life of a woman. The majority of women did not have the choice not to marry, because it was a necessity for survival. This was because the tradition in society that prevented women from making a living and had to rely on men. Women were considered not afford or did not have the work skills to make money. They had to submit to men should and did not act on their own. Thus indirectly this brought women into the suppression and limitation of movement in an environment which was dominated by men (Nelson, 2007:-4).

In the 18th century until the 19th century women were not able to obtain gender equality. Women have always been subject to male's power. They had to become obedient hostesses, patient wives and mothers, and helpers or supporters to their husbands and children. So women had to be a good mother and take care of the household well (Abrams, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian_britain/women/ideals_womanhood_09.shtml>). Similarly, in terms of gender ideology, traditionally, women were defined physically and intellectually as the 'weaker' sex, in all ways subordinate to male authority. In private life women were subject to fathers, husbands, brothers even adult sons. Publicly, men dominated all decision-making in political, legal and economic affairs (<<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/g/gender-ideology-and-seperate-spheres-19th-century/>>).

In the Victorian period, women's rights were very limited. They did not have a right to participate in politics, the right to sue, or the right to have property. When upper class women had married then the ownership of land and all other cash they produced or had would legally become their husband's property. Levi (1863:23) states, "By marriage, the personal identity of the woman

is lost. Her person is completely sunk in that of her husband, and he acquires an absolute mastery over her person and effects. Hence her complete disability to contract legal obligations; and except in the event of separation by divorce, or other causes, a married woman in the United Kingdom cannot engage in trade. Moreover, "... a woman, on marrying, relinquished her personal property—moveable property such as money, stocks, furniture, and livestock—to her husband's ownership; by law he was permitted to dispose of it at will at any time in the marriage and could even will it away at death (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Married_Women's_Property_Act_1870). Jim Powell (1996: 225) states, "In Western Europe during the late eighteenth century, single women had little protection under the law, and married women lost their legal identity. Women couldn't retain a lawyer, sign a contract, inherit property, vote, or have rights over their children."

On the other hand, liberal feminism is intended to fight for the rights of women in social class and in the community to be equal with men. According to Ruffcorn (2002), liberal feminism focuses on gender equity and its ability to adapt. The theory of liberal feminism emerges because women want to express their opinions in order to participate in everything so that they do not feel constrained by the superiority of men who have been controlling them. One example is that they want to work outside the home. It shows that they can be independent without depending on the help of man. Thus, gender equality implies that all men and women are free to develop their personal abilities and make life choices without the limitations set by stereotypes or prejudices about gender roles or the characteristics of men and women.

The topic of the study is Octavia's fight for woman rights. The topic is chosen for the study because the issue of gender inequality

has been a great concern nowadays. Men and women have equal rights in all aspects of life. Thus, oppression in the name of gender must be fought for. Related to the background of the study, the problem that will be discussed in this thesis is formulated as follows: How does Octavia fight for woman's rights? This study is expected to contribute to the study of contemporary themes in literary works, especially those themes that are issues in actual life at present. The study of Elizabeth Aston's *The Second Mrs. Darcy* is expected to give positive values on the importance of social equality.

METHOD

The research method used in this research is qualitative. In line with Blaxter's theory (1996:60) qualitative research is concerned with collecting and analyzing information in as many forms, chiefly non-numeric, as possible. It tends to focus on exploring, in as much detail as possible, smaller numbers of instances or examples which are seen as being interesting or illuminating, and aims to achieve 'depth' rather than 'breadth'. This method was chosen because it has the advantage of providing an understanding of social phenomena. In this case *The second Mrs. Darcy* serves as the primary data source, and the data are words, phrases, or sentences from the novel that are related to the topic of discussion.

The approaches used in this research are intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic approach elements are all things that inspired the writing of literary works and the influence of literature as a whole. These include theme, moral message, setting, character, etc. The intrinsic elements applied in this study are character and setting.

Characters are figures in the story, which according to Abrams (1999:32), are people who are present in dramatic or narrative works. Foster (in Kenney, 1966: 28-29) describes two specific types of character

feature, a flat character and a round character. A flat character is basically a character that has one side of the personality that will never change in the whole story. On the contrary, the round character is a character with more complex features of ability, psychology, and points of view based on the situations given in the story. Based on the character appearance, the character can be divided into protagonist and antagonist. The protagonist is usually a character which is regarded as a hero in a story and admired by readers because this character is considered performing actions for justice that can give sympathy to the reader. While the antagonist character usually against the protagonist character or become the protagonist rival. This character usually plays a role as a bad person who causes conflict. Then, according to the level of importance, the characters are divided into two parts, namely major characters and minor characters. A major character is an important figure at the center of the story's action or theme. The major character is sometimes called a protagonist whose conflict with an antagonist may spark the story's conflict. Supporting the major character are one or more secondary or minor characters whose function is partly to illuminate the major characters. Minor characters are often static or unchanging: they remain the same from the beginning of a work to the end (<http://www.unm.edu/~hookster/Elements of Fiction.pdf>). Characters in literature have important position because from the characters, the reader can understand the thoughts and intentions of the author. Thus, in literary works characters have an important position because by knowing the characters, readers come to understand the author's thoughts and intentions through dialogue and action based on the description given by the author. In other words, characters are actors in a story and the personality of the characters can be known from the dialogue or behavior defined by the author in the story.

The second element is setting, which is according to Meyer (1990:107) is the circumstances in which the actions of the story take place. Furthermore, Meyer divides setting into three categories: Setting of place, which is the background related with the location of the occurrence of events in a literary work; Setting of time, about when the occurrence of an event, such as how long it runs or passes in the story; and Setting of social environment, setting related to the behavior of social life in one place concerning customs, norms, beliefs, thought patterns, social status, etc. Setting is a very important element that forms a story because this element can determine the general situation of a work of literature (Abrams, 1999: 284). To find the settings in the story, we need to know or recognize when and where the characters in the story act. So the setting can help provide clarity in a literary work.

Extrinsic approach is the discussion that is focused on the study of other aspects outside literary element which have a great influence in shaping the literary works such as sociology, philosophy, psychology, etc (Wellek and Warren, 1948:65). The extrinsic elements applied in this study are the tradition and the values as well as the structure of social life reflected in the novel.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The novel depicts women as often forced to accept a low status because since childhood they have been taught to respect themselves lower than men. In the patriarchal household system women are regarded as harmful to social stability. Moreover, people often do not recognize the legal rights of women and the power to take decisions. They think men can contribute to the family's wealth and the women are considered not to have the ability for it, so they are only instructed in domestic duties. This situations cause rebellion as practiced by Octavia, who is always forced to marry because she is considered not able to

take care of her own life. However, Octavia has a passion to be independent and maintain her rights.

Octavia as one of the main characters is described as a woman who has a stubborn nature and braves to pull out her own opinion. She is determined to become an independent woman. Octavia did it because she was never given a freedom to do things that she wants. This is evidenced in the following quotations:

And here she was, more than five years older, once again to be put up for sale by her sisters like a horse to any man who would take her off their hands. How shocked they would be when they learned of her plans for an independent life, how furious that she were become so rich, how enraged that she had kept the fact to herself. (Aston, 2007:83).

Besides, the prospect of beginning a new life as a rich, independent woman was an enticing one (Aston, 2007:120).

She insists that as a woman she can be independent by looking for employment. She thinks that women can make money for themselves by working and do not necessarily to rely on their husbands.

"Or I could seek employment as a governess," said Octavia, still angry, and yielding to an impulse to annoy her sister (Aston, 2007:31).

"I shall have a small income, on which, with care and good management, I shall be able to live" (Aston, 2007:11).

It can be seen from the above excerpt that Octavia has a thought to be independent. Octavia who does not want to depend entirely on the husband and is tied at home as experienced in the previous marriage finally begins to open up the sound. She refuses the idea that women have to get married for financial security and social status. She is aware of the gender inequality that has been conditioned since birth. So she wants to be rid

of everything related to the dominance of men in her life.

“But I don’t want to marry again!” exclaimed Octavia, furious at the heartlessness of her sister’s words. “It is less than a year since Christopher died, I am mourning, I have no wish to be looking for another husband” (Aston, 2007:30).

Octavia’s not wanting to marry is a form of resistance to the dominance of men. It represents her feminist view that women must not depend on men. Women have a right to be independent as the men do. Octavia argues that if a woman has to get married, it must be based on love. To match other people with reason to increase class or social background is not the right thing which becomes the basis of a marriage. It can be seen in the following quotation:

“Octavia was trying to convince Sir Joseph that Mr. Quintus Dance was no fortune hunter, that he and Charlotte were in Love, and that he would make her a good husband, if they reached Scotland and found a clergyman who would marry them” (Aston, 2007:283).”

What Octavia is done shows her fight against gender inequality by showing that women also have the right to choose a partner they want. Octavia does not agree on the idea that women have to live for men and must identify themselves as the object of love. The right to love is the basis of happiness. Octavia thinks that marriage must be based on love and the couple must have equal position. She views marriage as a partnership, not a constant imposition of authority or superiority. Octavia’s view on marriage can be seen in the quotation below:

“Octavia was touched by the very real affection between them, and indeed between the older couple. It was the same easy trust and liking that she had found at the Ackworths’, marriage as a partnership, not a constant imposition of authority or

superiority, an equal match, one where the moral advantage did not fall too heavily on one side nor the other” (Aston, 2007:162).

From the description above it can be concluded that Octavia is a character that has the courage to come out of the shackles of the family where the women are always considered unable to do anything other than rely on their husbands.

Octavia does not only oppose the idea and practice that women have to get married for financial security or social status but she also oppose women suppression in law in term of owning property in which women are always marginalized. Octavia who has the courage immediately takes stand to refuse the marginalized position of women by destroying rules which sets women as worthless beings. Octavia’s rejection to look for a husband is a way to be free from law suppression. By living independently she would not lose her rights to own her properties and to manage them by herself freely.

“She could see that he was going to argue, and could watch his mental processes as he thought better of it. She knew just what was going through his mind, that in no time at all, she would be married again, and her fortune would pass into the hand of a man, someone who would take care of everything for her.

“Not so,” she said to the nearest cow, who gazed at her with huge, soft eyes. “I am a woman of independent means, definitely in possession of a good fortune, but I am not in the least in want of a husband (Aston, 2007: 54)!”

“Since she had much money to risk—but no. The biggest gamble she would make would be to take the reins of her inheritance into her own hands, instead of relying on her brother to manage it for her, or instead of at once looking for a husband, to whom, under the law, the whole of her fortune would then belong (Aston, 2007: 161).”

Liberal feminism is emerging due to an awareness of democratic rights and injustice that are very strong in society, especially those that occur in women. Octavia who demands gender equality argues that women should react or act when there is opposition from men. Women have to make any effort to gain their rights. When Octavia finds out that Mr. Warren makes a scheme to deprive her of her fortune, she is determined to fight for her rights.

“I will fight this every inch of the way, Mr. Wilkinson (Aston, 2007:230).”

The other rights of women that Octavia fights for are injustice treatment and emancipation to men. Octavia is fighting to create self-sufficiency for women who are still constrained by society in general.

“A threat? I threaten you? I merely wish to warn you—”

“Stop there, or you will later wish that you had done so. After being bullied and harassed by my brother Arthur for most of my life, I am now in the delightful position of finding myself an independent woman in charge of my own fortune and life, and I do not give a jot for Arthur’s opinion. Nor whether you have sufficient influence to hinder the advancement in Parliament he so keenly long for” (Aston, 2007:176).

The quotation above very clearly shows that Octavia is bold clashing arguments with Lord Rutherford who interferes with her business. Octavia who has realized the need for self-development and refuses women submission attempts to achieve this goal.

Women are the people who cannot reach their political rights because of the lack of open space for women in politics. Octavia, however, shows her role as a woman who has knowledge of political issues and wants to participate in politic.

“Are you a Tory, to go against the Whig in such a way?”

“To be truthful, Mr. Forsyte, I am only now beginning to form political opinion of my own. My family are Tory, through and through, but from what I have heard and seen since I came back to England, I rather think I share my Whiggish views. I may even wake up one day to find myself a Radical!” (Aston, 2007:176).

Octavia wants to raise the dignity of women with the development of reasoning and insight. Thus, she tries to improve her fate and existence. She wants to take the role and benefits in some sectors of life. It is shown in the quotation below:

“I wish I could have been a nabob,” said Octavia, her eyes gleaming. “There we are women dispatched in an East India boat in the fishing fleet, our goal a husband, and travelling alongside us are men setting off to earn their fortunes by activity and hard work.”

In her age that is more than twenty-five years, she tries to reflect her position as a woman in society or in family that are always under-emphasized.

“It was as though the intervening years had never happened, as though Octavia were a nineteen-year-old girl once again, expected to be obedient and to listen to her elders and better.

She had had enough of this. She was a grown woman, a married woman, if now a widow; what right had her sister to treat her in this way and lay down the law about what she should and shouldn’t do?” (Aston, 2007:31).

“No,” said Octavia. I will not authorize you to act on my behalf, indeed, I shall write to the lawyers and say quite clearly that they are to deal of lawyers with no one but myself. And don’t puff up like that, Arthur. I am of age, well past my majority, as you all remind me, a married woman, and more than capable of seeing a lawyer, any number” (Aston, 2007:34).

The quotation above shows that Octavia whose right and freedom are oppressed dares

to take a rigorous manner to show her independence that she can responsible for herself. Octavia very rarely asks for help to others. She always tries to resolve any issues or decides matters relating to herself with her own power because she does not want to look weak. This is a challenge for Octavia as woman to continue to fight for policies that harm women.

In patriarchal society women are not taught autonomy because they do not have the right to be free and just accept what is given by the superior. Octavia is present as a figure who is able to dismantle that view. The quotation below shows how persistence Octavia confronts people around her who contradict it.

“I am not a girl in my first season, I don't have to find myself a husband,” said Octavia. She was looking around the room, filling up fast with the Wyttons' friends, lively looking people with intelligent faces; how different from the dull politicians of her last party” (Elizabeth Aston, 2007:142).

Octavia not only fights for women's independence but also for women's free of speech. Octavia believes that everyone including women has the freedom to propose thought. Octavia is very critical of all problems especially concerning the equality between men and women. She does not want to just accept the other people's opinions. Octavia then performs the steps to demonstrate her existence by voicing the thoughts which is the right of every person.

“Annoyed, she raised her voice, and asked him what was his opinion of the subsidies to the maharajahs.

Ha, that silenced him, although it earned her several curious glances and not a few turned heads. “For some of them most supported by the government are of a tyrannical disposition,” she continued.

His eyes grew cold. “You set yourself up to have an opinion on matters about which you know nothing.” And then, mercifully, he edged away, saying in an audible voice

that he deplored a clever woman, a woman who expressed her views on subjects about which she knew nothing, less than nothing” (Aston, 2007:133).

“I'm not looking for liveliness. Octavia Darcy! When I wanted her, I'd find she was off galloping about the countryside, and when I hoped for soothing agreement to my opinion of some political issue, she would argue every inch of the way” (Aston, 2007:239).

However, struggle to get the freedom is not easy because of the social values and culture that are still adhered to the patriarchal system. So when Octavia makes her own decisions to fight for her rights it is considered nonsense because of the assumption that women are irrational or emotional so that women can not handle the case properly. Thus cause the circulation of rumors or gossip about her by people around.

“You will set all London by the ears, although I do not suppose you care about that, you take a positive pleasure in going against the wishes of all those concerned for your well-being” (Aston, 2007:194).

The Fighting spirit of Octavia is basically in accordance with liberal feminism view. Feminists show and maintain their equality with men with their action and their own choice. It is women's awareness of themselves which can release them from discrimination that harassing their presence in every field. Octavia fight for women's rights in her own way in matters of social class and gender equality.

Octavia who continues to fight and does not give up towards the condition can reserve the situation. With a strong determination, she finally gain support and help from her friends. Thus she can find her own happiness, such as the following quotation:

Octavia's days were full. She was making new friends, finding herself happiest among the numerous circle of Henrietta

Rowan and Mr. Portal's friends; clever men and women who led interesting lives and talked about books and paintings and music and travel, as well as politics, a circle far removed from the generally stuffy set of her sisters and brother, which was all the people she had formerly known in London (Aston, 2007:217).

The result of her fight to obtain women's rights is that she gains her freedom in every way. She finally also can retain her inheritance which is her right.

Lord Rutherford disconcerted her by changing the subject. "I have news for you that will put a lilt into your step and joy into your voice," he said. "Mr. Warren has withdrawn his claim."

Octavia couldn't believe her ears.

"Mr. Warren has done what?"

"Withdrawn his claim to your inheritance, absolutely, without reservation, he agrees he has no claim (Aston, 2007:292).

Octavia is also finally able to give an opinion and obtain the same opportunities as men. She finds a future husband, Lord Rutherford, who does not mind with her speaking up of her mind and will settle all Octavia's fortune upon her if they get married. And when a woman was able to escape from the shackles of the dominance of men, then the women can already be classified as an independent woman.

Only a few days ago, the knowledge that she could return to take up the threads of her life in her small London house would have filled Octavia with Joy. Now it hardly seemed to matter; she was glad it was all over, but her concern for her future and her fortune had paled into insignificance in comparison to what had happened to her here at Netherfield House.

... "Warren may say that I acted from self-interest, desirous of adding your fortune to my own."

"What do you think he will dare? I should not venture a second round with you, were I in his shoes."

"In any case, I intend to settle all your fortune upon you, and upon our children, so you need not suspect I am any kind of a fortune hunter" (Aston, 2007:297).

From data analyzed, it is clear that the novel is written in the spirit of feminism. Feminism may arise because women experience gender inequality that take place both in the family or social environment where existing distinction only empowers men and disempowers women. Octavia fights in order to have many opportunities to express herself as a woman freely in business and interest. Although no doubt there are still some obstacles, Octavia wants to show that women can provide a role in life outside the home. Octavia tries to make women have awareness to make choices for themselves and they do not have to worry when changes occur in their traditions because it is process of development.

CONCLUSION

In this novel, Octavia as main character who is described as a stubborn, smart and also brave fight for women's rights. First, she insists that as a woman she can be independent by looking for employment. She thinks that women can make money for themselves by working and do not necessarily to rely on their husbands. Octavia argues that if a woman has to get married, it must be based on love. She views marriage as a partnership, not a constant imposition of authority or superiority. Then Octavia also oppose women suppression in law in term of owning property in which women are always marginalized. Octavia's rejection to look for a husband is a way to be free from law suppression. By living independently she would not lose her rights to own her properties and to manage them by herself freely. The other rights of women that Octavia fights for are injustice treatment and emancipation to men. She shows her role as a

woman who has knowledge of political issues and wants to participate in politic. Finally, Octavia also fights for women's free of speech. Octavia believes that everyone including women has the freedom to propose thought. She does not want to just accept the other people's opinions and demonstrate her existence by voicing the thoughts which is the right of every person. Octavia's constantly fights and does not give up towards the condition, finally gains her freedom in every way. She can find her own happiness, retains her inheritance which is her right, and is finally able to obtain the same opportunities as men.

From the whole analysis of the Octavia fight for women's rights, it can be concluded that women and men have equal rights. Women should react or act when there is opposition from men and make any effort to gain their rights because women are also entitled to determine the dream or their own fate. They should not give up against any difficult obstacle so that, they can find a way to achieve what they want.

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