Uncovering Gender Disparity in Margaret Atwood's The Blind Assassin

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Abstract

Mostly telling about Iris Chase, *The Blind Assassin* projects a series of complex circumstances that happened in her family and marriage lives. Realizing that this novel also contains gender issues, therefore this study focused on gender differences by the characters portrayed in *The Blind Assassin*, a historical fiction novel by Margaret Atwood. Due to a number of considerations, the content of the novel tickled this curiosity about how gender differences occur in the novel, to which this will lead to the prime discussion of this analysis. The data were collected by adapting Miles and Huberman's qualitative research model. Through analyzing the content and meaning of the text, this research applied McKee's textual analysis (2003) in order to describe and reveal the messages contained in the novel. Based on the results of existing data analysis, it was found that gender differences occur in some parts of the novel. Furthermore, the major difference was noticed on the gender inequality between men and women. It was strengthened by the data that the men characters were significantly dominant rather than the women characters in the novel.

Keywords: gender, fiction novel, textual analysis, *The Blind Assassin*.

1. Introduction

Gender identity is predominant in every social structure. Ehrlich et al. (2014) and Holmes & Meyerhoff (2003) mention the terms of gender as a visible difference between men and women which created in the context of a person's behavior. Understanding the concept of gender must be distinguished between the word gender and sex. Sex is the interpretation or division of biologically determined human sexes that are inherent in sex and are the nature of God who cannot be changed, which is understood that sex is a sex division based on biological dimensions and cannot be changed (Dell & Poole, 2008). Meanwhile, Gender is often regarded as God's unchangeable nature. It deals with patriarchal tradition or culture created by the local community (Sunderland, 2006; Dell & Poole, 2008).

Gender differences actually should not happen to be a social issue among the society. However, it turns out to be that gender differences have given rise to injustice for both men and especially women (Hasanah, 2013). Abdullah (2001) argues that as a limitation to express the problem of feminism can only be associated with gender. Gender

arises because of the development of the human mindset recognizing the position of women together with men in their lives.

Abdullah (2001) says that gender-based relationships are (1) relationships between people of different sexes and that is a hierarchical relationship, which can cause social problems, (2) gender is a concept that tend to be descriptive rather than exploitation of behavior, social position, and experience between men and women, (3) gender formulates that symmetrical relationships between men and women as natural orders or normal. From the explanations and opinions of experts, it can be concluded that gender is a trait possessed by men and women, for example men are masculine while women are feminine but can be influenced by their respective cultures.

Based on this understanding, it can be seen that the novel is an extraordinary literary work that can be enjoyed by anyone who reads it. In addition to these reasons, this research is focused on the novel because the novel's position in literary learning material. Thus, analyzing a novel has something to do with several purposes, such as to finding similarities from the novel with our real life, finding any specific parts from the novel, or even finding gender differences based on character revelation from the main novel

The researchers choose Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* to be analyzed to clear up the gender differences between the characters in the best seller novel of early millennium era. Moreover, gender differences does not only occur in our daily communication through many conversations. It also can be found in a novel which contains many interpretation through direct and indirect way which presented by the novelist**.**

There have been many researches on language and gender. Since 1960s, Sociolinguists have had great attention on gender with its relation to the use of language (Hornberger & McKay, 2010). The early research focus on the grammatical and the lexical of the language use of each gender. As the time pass, the science about language and gender was established with an essay written by Robin Lakoff at the mid of 70s (Putri et al., 2017).

Regarding the analysis of gender differences, there is some previous research related to the writers' research. Start from the research by Petterson (2014) entitled A Gender Perspective on the Possession of Power in J. M. Cotezee's Disgrace. The essay focuses on the two characters, David and Petrus and their way of acting. The question asked is simply: how do these two men use women to gain their power? And how do they deal with women? The result can be summarized in the following way: at the beginning the male character tears women apart till they become totally insecure and thus they can control them completely. Petrus remains this way but as time goes by, David's thoughts of women gradually changes.

Another research is from Li (2014) related to Sociolinguistic Study of Language and Gender in Desperate Housewives. The study mainly concentrates on differences in the amount of talk, the amount of turns and distribution of them. Its findings are as follows. In terms of the amount of talk, men use more words to compose more sentences. In other words, they are much more talkative than women. In the aspect of the amount of turns, men are inclined to take the turn floor for a longer time. In a word, the proposed research, though has some limitations, is of theoretical and practical significance.

There are several previous researches related with *The Blind Assassin* novel by Margaret Atwood. Firstly, Hembrough (2017) conducted a research entitled From an Obscured Gaze to a Seeing Eye? Iris as Victim, Villain, and Avenger in the Role of Writer-as-Assassin in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* and elaborated Iris Chase's role in that story including as a protagonist narrator. Secondly, Filtness (2014) entitled *The end or The End*: Ageing, Memory and Reliability in Margaret Atwood's Fictional Autobiography, *The Blind Assassin* discussed about the story's element, especially about the themes of the story. Thirdly, Feldman-Kolodziejuk's (2014) Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* as a Social Chronicle of 20th Century that analyzed about the social changes happened in the story's settings. Then the fourth, the research that belongs to Fazli & Hafezikermani (2012) entitled Power and Truth in Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* focused on the discussion of the novel's characters. Continued to the fifth research by Lin (2005) entitled *Only the Blind are Free*: Sight and Blindness in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* analyzed the novel based on its narrative aspects, and lastly, Ingersoll (2003) entitled Waiting for the End: Closure in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* explained about on how the narrative aspects affected the revelation of each character in the novel. Different from those previous studies, the reason this study examines gender issues is based on the existence of women who feel oppressed trying to fight for their rights. The weakness and ignorance of women is not because of God's nature, but because of prejudices that give birth to gender injustice so that they are not accustomed to and are not given the same opportunities as men. Through the analysis of gender in *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood, there will be known forms of gender bias which give birth to gender injustice towards women.

The problems that arise in the novel are shown in the many forms of gender prejudice that deals with gender injustice experienced by the main character. This would rather tickle researchers' curiosity to examine the existence of gender differences in the novel. Researchers feel it is important to examine gender inequality because it often occurs in the community that women are considered weak and helpless second-class beings. Therefore, it also becomes the focus of this analysis that is trying to examine the main characters who occur the most in the story.

Furthermore, the gender differences was noticed in the content of the novel accordingly, the way gender differences are represented in this fiction novel, needs to be identified and elaborated. This study focused on gender differences portrayed by the characters in *The Blind Assassin* novel by a Canadian novelist, Margaret Atwood.

2. Methods

There were some aspects that used by the researchers in order to determine and describe the method used, such as source of the data, data collection and data analysis.

2.1 Source of the Data

In this case, this analysis discusses about the gender differences based on character revelation from the main novel *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood and the story-within-story in that novel which has the same title, *The Blind Assassin* by Laura Chase. Generally, *The Blind Assassin* Novel is an International Winner of the Booker Prize Novel in 2000. The novel was published by Anchor Books, New York.

The novel is about Iris Chase who told about her series of events that direct to Laura, Iris Chase's sister's death.

The major problem was roughly started with Iris married a rich lad, Richard Griffen to save her family's factory. Unfortunately, her father passed away and the factory eventually was shut down. Then, Laura lived with the Griffen family and she started to show unstable behavior to which it caused her to be placed in a mental hospital. Telling about Iris' husband's disparaging behavior, Laura committed to a suicide. Iris wrote *The Blind Assassin* to take revenge on her husband and this led to Richard's ruin that he took his own life. Finally, Iris composed another book that explained about the details on her family for she desired to conciliate with her granddaughter.

2.2 Data Collection

In order to make a qualitative data analysis it is necessary to do a sequence of activity. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014:8) stated that three main activities should be conducted during the analysis process, they are data condensation, data display, and conclusion. They also elaborated that in data condensation, the researcher should do the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that show up in the interview or documents; it is important in order to make the data more trustworthy (p.8). Moreover, the data display activity leads the researcher to understand the current issue that allows the researcher to take action or to do further analysis (p.8). Drawing and verifying conclusions activity makes the researcher verify the trustworthiness in the form of brief elaboration (p.9). With the research model from Miles and Huberman, this research followed the sequence of activity by doing the first activity that is to choose or to select the data that are necessary to be analyzed. After conducting further analysis, then the conclusion had been made. It is important to show trustworthy data and overall research at the end of the study.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through textual analysis method. According to McKee (2003), the used of textual analysis can get possible interpretations that might be made of that text This supports by Lockyer (2008) that textual analysis is the appropriate method in analyzing the content and meaning of texts, in order to describe and find the messages contained in texts.

3. Results

Analysis of the data from the content of the novel revealed in the form of table description. The findings are presented along with the analysis.

Table 1. The Findings and Descriptions related with the Gender Differences in *The Blind Assassin* novel by Margaret Atwood

Data	Finding(s)	Description(s)
Data 1	*"The blind assassin hears all rumors, and so he knows the real truth about those*	The man becomes the Antagonist character because the man is the Blind Assassin himself, and he has several tricky plans to fulfill his demand. Based on the part of

	women. They aren't actually dead at all. They just put stories by the blind assassin so they'll left in peace."	mentioned paragraph, the man had a power from the woman based on the rumors made. It is the way of how the man threatening the woman by direct action.
Data 2	*"Father said he was going to take me into town. He'd never paid much attention to me, or Laura either."*	Regarding with the paragraph that was found from which the writer described the behavior of Iris' father who really wants to do in arbitrarily. It is proven through the action by Iris' father who never paid much attention to Iris or Laura. It is the way of how the man had more power than woman, especially when the man and the woman are in a relation.
Data 3	*"I opened the drawer, I saw the notebooks. I undid the crisscross of kitchen string that tied them together. I noticed that my teeth were chattering, and I was cold all over."*	From the mentioned statement, it can be concluded that Iris was in shocked because her teeth were chattering and she was cold all over because of Laura's death. In this case, the woman is weaker than man regarding to the control of mental and feeling of sadness. It is proven by the act of chattering teeth because of the death of someone.
Data 4	*"One day, when Iris and Laura Playing together, while at the same time their mother having a teacup, their mother fall suddenly and this accident also watched by Reenie. Five days later, their mother died. She died because of fever."*	The paragraph mentioned is the part when the author describes the dead of Iris and Laura's mother. It was found that the dead of their mother was happened in a sudden when they are playing together. Thus, there is an interpretation of the woman's sadness which describes through Reenie action that watched her mother fall in a sudden.
Data 5	*"After the man told his story, their relationship was closer than before. The man and the woman talk about how about to live together. They would live together each other, but the woman would not leave her husband."*	The paragraph in data 7 is the part when the author describes the man and the woman planning a serious relationship. It is in the part when the story-within-story described the relationship between the man and woman. Hence, there is a gap between the persuasion act by the man and the woman. When the man persuaded the woman to leave her husband and live together with him, the woman said that she would not leave her husband. In this case, it was found that the woman thought twice before agreeing something that the man, especially about breaking the commitment with her husband.

Data 6	"*Good girl, he moves towards her, takes hold of her.*"	The sentence in data 8 is the part when the author describes the man who walked closely to the woman. The man stated the sentence in order to emphasize the good girl who accepted his demands. In this case, it was found that the man could impress the woman by asking her to do something. The impression can be related to the charisma of the man and also the feeling of the woman.

4. Discussion

Based on the findings through character revelation above, it is related to some of the related theories found about gender differences. It is quite clear that men and women have a lot of differences in many area of concerns.

As it is stated in Data 1 and Data 2, it is showed that there is a way of how the man had more power than the woman, especially when the man and the woman are in a relation. In other words, the patriarchal system is happening in the found utterances. Moreover, these utterances represent masculinity from the men's side, to which men are shown as a powerful and unresponsive individual. Supardan (2020) explains that masculinity may be found in anybody who shows competitiveness, aggressiveness, insensitiveness, and independency. According to Lorber (1994), it turns out that gender differences have become a problem of gender differences, giving birth to various gender inequalities, especially for women. This is supported by Fauziah, Mulyana, & Raharjo (2015) who asserts that gender injustice is a system and structure in which both men and women are victims of the system, and it can be seen through the various manifestations of injustice that exist.

Regarding the findings in Data 3 and Data 4, it was found that the woman has more sensitive feeling rather than the man. Moreover, in both sentences, the women also show their tendency to be emotional towards everything, whether it only occurs in their memory or tangible things. It is related to the equity feminism which contends that males and females may have different roles and emotional management (Xia, 2013; Ghajarieh & Mozaheb, 2012).

Based on the findings from Data 5 and Data 6, they relate to the power of men that controls women. The findings referred to the assumptions or guesses made by the community. According to (Noor & Termini, 2017) and people think that women are second-class society and are always retarded by men in any case. Besides that, Hills (2000) mentioned that women are considered as the second class after men, who can succeed if a man in a family has succeeded. Men are always prioritized in every action and decision making, both in public relations and in family relationships (Mutmainah, 2015). Besides that, Llach and Gallego (2012) mentioned that men usually have to undertake more pressure than women in life.

After all, gender is a trait inherent in men and women that has been constructed socially and culturally quite long. Supardan (2020) proposed that any masculine traits that occur in women's identity cannot be defied, but when facing the issue, especially in male-dominated society. It is necessary to expand the paradigm on women's ability and capability. Therefore, since men and women have their very own capabilities and limitations, the differences between genders are not entirely a problem as long as the society itself treats women and men equally.

5. Conclusions

Quoting from Hasanah (2013) that gender differences which becomes one of impactful gender issues in the society has affected men's and women's rights in every aspect of life. Since this novel implicitly shows the signs of gender differences in the novel, thus this study has cyclically analyzed the data and deciphered them into elaborations, especially elaborating gender differences found in the characters of the novel.

Generally, *The Blind Assassin* is a story that mostly tells about Iris Chase, who discovered her whole life that contained several complex problems. Such as the death of her mother, her broken marriage with his husband, and also the tragedy ending that her sister, Laura Chase was dead because of driving car off the bridge. Besides that, Iris also discovered Laura's novel which had the revealing fact in that contents of the novel, related with the boy who Laura loved very much.

Based on the data found, it is clear that the gender differences occur in some parts of the novel, to which the major differences are on the gender inequality between men and women. It is strengthened by the data that the men who represented by Norval Chase, Richard and Alex Thomas are dominant rather than the women who represented by Iris Chase, Laura Chase, Liliana Chase and Reenie. In conclusion, the dominance of the men creates gender differences, especially gender inequality towards the women of *The Blind Assassin*.

Acknowledgments

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