

The Display of Woman Independence in Lucinda Grace's Books and Bribes

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Abstract:

This research explores the themes of feminism in a novel written by Lucinda Race entitled "Books and Bribes" in 2023. This novel focuses Lily, the main character's investigation in a murder case. Lily has a role of female detective in this novel. In this research, the author analyzes how the female characters in this novel, particularly Lily, are capable of doing investigation of murder case without too much reliance on the male characters. By doing close reading, this research uses the qualitative method and descriptive analysis to analyze the novel. The data and primary source of this research is the novel itself. In this research, the author analyzes how women's independence as one of the sub topic for feminism displayed throughout the story. This research discovered that women's independence in this novel are displayed in two ways. The first one is witch as the representation of feminism, and the second is independent relationship.

Keywords: woman independence; feminism; witchcraft; investigation; mystery

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengeksplor tema feminisme dalam sebuah novel berjudul "Books and Bribes" yang ditulis oleh Lucinda Race pada tahun 2023. Novel ini berfokus pada Lily, sang karakter utama yang melakukan sebuah investigasi mengenai suatu kasus pembunuhan. Dalam novel ini, Lily memiliki peran sebagai seorang detektif perempuan. Dalam studi ini, peneliti menganalisis bagaimana karakter perempuan dalam novel ini, terutama Lily, mampu melakukan investigasi sebuah kasus pembunuhan tanpa terlalu banyak bergantung pada laki-laki. Dengan membaca cermat, penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan analisis deskriptif untuk menganalisis isi novel. Sumber data utama dari penelitian ini adalah novel *Books and Bribes* itu sendiri. Dalam penelitian ini, penulis menganalisis bagaimana kemandirian perempuan ditunjukkan dalam cerita. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kemandirian perempuan dalam novel ini ditampilkan dalam dua cara. Yang pertama adalah bagaimana feminisme direpresentasikan, dan yang kedua adalah hubungan yang independen.

Kata kunci: kemandirian perempuan; feminisme; penyihir; investigasi; misteri

INTRODUCTION

In societal norms, it is very often occurred that women are viewed as the second sex or the second gender (de Beauvoir, 2011). It is very common in their daily life that women experience various discriminatory events. This discriminatory attitude usually comes from



men (Oswald, 2023). Some men feel that their gender is more important and significant. Some of them also think that men are more superior than women. Mirroring what actually happened in real life, there are some men that believe they have the rights and the power to control women's life. These controls include how women should behave, the job they could have, the position they could accept, what kind of clothes they should or could wear, and many more. This makes women's life more constrained. Women are often restricted because of the domination done by men. This kind of male authority over women does not only apply to their partner or families. Even when the relationship between a man and a woman is practically a stranger, men often feel that they have far more power over women.

It is acknowledged that discriminatory attitudes towards women generally come from men. That being said, it is not rare for this discriminatory attitude to come from even women themselves. Because the mindset that men's status is above women has already deeply rooted in societal norms, the women's hatred towards women itself arise. This phenomenon is commonly known as internalized misogyny. If people find a woman who behaves incorrectly according to general societal norms, it is not uncommon that some other women will often criticize that woman. In fact, the criticism that comes from women themselves is even worse than the criticism women received from men. Women who are supposed to support and provide comfort to other women, unnecessarily critique other women's behavior that are against the "societal norms". This kind of judgment given by women to other women gives men some kind of validation. Men feel that what they have been doing to women is right and absolutely correct. This strengthens the oppression of men against women.

Books and Bribes is a novel written by Lucinda Grace in 2023. This novel is the first part of the *Paranormal Witch Cozy Mystery* series. Although this novel is part of a series, each story in the novel is different from the other parts, so that readers do not need to read the entire contents of the series. The only things that are related in each part of the series are the recurring appearance of certain characters and the development of their relationships. The main genre of this novel is mystery, fantasy, romance, and magical realism. Usually, the main character in a mystery or fictional detective novel is a man. However, in this novel, the main character is a woman named Lily Michael. At first, Lily was introduced as a normal bookshop owner. However, one day, suddenly Lily's pet, a

black cat named Milo, could talk. Milo introduces himself as a "familiar" to Lily. Through Milo, Lily discovers that she is actually a witch. In order to cast magic spells, Lily must study a book entitled *Practical Beginnings*. The book is old, has a black cover, and contains various magic spells.

On the same day, that night Lily and her best friends are going to have their routine for a movie night at a library. Lily came to the library a little bit later than her friends. Their agenda hadn't even started when suddenly a murder case occurred. The murder happened to Flora Gray, the head librarian. When the movie night was almost starting, suddenly Aunt Mimi, Lily's aunt, screamed for help. Once Lily and her friends approached Aunt Mimi, they found Flora lying helplessly. Not too far away from Flora, there was a baseball bat covered in blood. Some roses were also found under Flora's body. Lily called Gage, a police detective officer. Feeling intrigued about the case, Lily started a private investigation. With the help of Nikki, her best friend, and Gage, her love interest, the journey of finding Flora's murderer has begun.

As a female main character, Lily has a smart, brave, and strong-willed personality. Most fictional mystery novels have a male detective character. To name some, there are Sherlock Holmes, Edogawa Conan, and Hercule Poirot. However, in *Books and Bribes*, the detective main character is a woman. The focus of this paper is how women's independence is represented in this novel. This novel explores how Lily, as a female main character, is having the role of "detective" and carrying out an investigation on a murder case. This leads to the research problem of this study: How is woman independence being displayed in the *Books and Bribes* novel? Through this study, the author demonstrates that women are also capable of doing a traditionally male-dominated roles. The author hopes that this paper will contribute to academic research about gender equality and feminism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the selected novel, *Books and Bribes* by Lucinda Race was just recently published in 2023, the author did not find any research or study related to this novel. There are also no studies analyzing other novels written by Lucinda Race. However, the author found some literature that has a similar topic to this research.

Bubíková & Roebuck (2022) wrote an article entitled *Female Investigators: Rewriting the Masculine Narrative of Fiction*. This article said that most detective protagonist characters

in fiction novels are dominated by men, while female detectives usually was rarer. Even if there are female detective characters, those female detectives usually tend to have the role of helpers rather than the main investigator or the main detective. For example, is Robin Ellacott, a character from a work written by Robert Galbraith. Robin is an assistant who also later becomes Cormoran Strike's business partner in his detective agency. Strike is the male detective main character. Robert wrote Robin's character based on the real life in which men dominate the role of investigator more than women.

Aside from the previously discussed article, there is also a thesis entitled *The Mystery of the Missing Half: The Developing Female Investigator Trope in Detective Fiction* written by Anthony E. Farah (2019). This thesis states that fictional detective stories tend to be male-centric. This often happens because of patriarchy. The fact that most detective characters are men rather than women is evidence of male hegemony over women. Although detective characters are usually male, many of these characters are also have inappropriate and dysfunctional personality. Even if there are female detective characters, those characters are usually portrayed as a woman who acts like a man and has masculinity tendencies.

RESEARCH METHODS

To conduct this research, the author uses a qualitative method. For the primary source, the author uses the novel *Books and Bribes* by Lucinda Race itself. For secondary sources, the author uses books, academic articles, and studies related to this study. By using a qualitative method, the author could have a deeper analysis of the novel's content related to the display of women's independence in the novel.

To explain the results of the study, the author uses descriptive analysis. By using descriptive analysis, the author is able to explain in more depth about how women's independence is being portrayed in the *Books and Bribes* novel.

To conduct the research procedure, the author did close reading. The author read the selected novel, *Books and Bribes* several times to ensure that the author understood the contents of the novel Books and Bribes. After understanding the story and the characters of this novel, the author then highlighted the important parts that could be used as supporting materials in this article. These important parts were then analyzed and explained using the descriptive analysis method.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Witch as the representation of feminism

In the *Books and Bribes* novel, Lily is portrayed as an ordinary woman who works as a bookshop owner. However, one day, she finds a book given by her aunt, Aunt Mimi. The book contains spells that could be casted for the use of magic powers. Not long after finding the book, Lily's pet, a black cat named Milo, is suddenly able to talk. The cat says that he has been waiting for this moment for a long time. Through Milo, Lily finally finds out that she and several people in her town are witches. Not only Lily, Aunt Mimi and Nikki, Lily's closest friend, are also witches.

This novel mentioned that the witches are not only female, but also male. That being said however, the role of female witches in the *Books and Bribes* novel is much more prominent than the male witches. Not only that, the number of female witches in this novel outweighs the number of male witches, at least the characters that are presented in the novel. Historically, most witches are usually more known as women. Witches are also often associated with having black cats as pets. Similar with this stereotype, Lily also has a black cat as a familiar in this novel. Although Lily and Aunt Mimi's familiar are black cats, this does not apply to all the other witches. Nikki, Lily's best friend who turns out to be a kitchen witch, has a golden retriever familiar named Murphy. It is coincidental that Lily and her aunt have black cats as familiars.

Although female witches were usually portrayed as evil characters, like Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*, for example, all of the female witch characters in this novel have good personalities and are on the protagonist's side. Lily is a female witch who has high morals and willpower. Aunt Mimi is described as a gentle and loving aunt. She is also kind to the people around her. Nikki, Lily's best friend, is described as a kind woman and a very loyal friend. She always supports Lily no matter what happens. Not only that, Nikki is also described as having an angelic appearance with strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes. This is in contrast to the stereotype of witches who usually have black hair and eyes that give an evil impression.

Lily, Aunt Mimi, and Nikki who are described as secretly having a witch identity are all good characters. Although Lily, Aunt Mimi, and Nikki each has their own partner or love interest, they are never depicted as someone who is too dependent on their partners. In fact, Lily, Aunt Mimi, and Nikki often take the first act before the other male characters

in the novel. They are also wise and know how to stand up for themselves. They are able to cast spells that could help them in their daily activities. The ability of female witches to cast these spells could be viewed as a symbolism of women's inner strength and self-reliance.

Independent Relationship

Lily has a man who becomes her love interest, Gage Erikson. Gage Erikson is a man who is portrayed as having a handsome face. Gage works as a detective in the police force. As a police detective, Gage has a dependable, smart, and brave personality. He is also friendly to the people around Lily. As a love interest, Gage has a protective side towards Lily. One example of his protective side is shown at the beginning of the story when Lily calls Gage because of a murder case. As soon as he arrived at the scene, the first thing Gage asked was Lily's condition and well-being.

Despite him showing good signs as a love interest, Lily rarely relies on Gage. While she does ask Gage's help a few times for her investigation, Lily also actually discover more evidence of the murder case than Gage, or any of the police. In her journey to find Flora's murderer, Lily not only discussed with Gage, but also with Milo and Nikki. Nikki often accompanies Lily in discovering the murder case of Flora Gray. The relationship between Lily and Nikki shows female solidarity and women's ability to do something without relying too much on men. This also dismiss the negative stereotyped that women always compete with each other.

Through the friendship between Lily and Nikki, readers are shown that women are perfectly capable of supporting each other without the need of seeking validation for men. Rather than doing an investigation to seek attention from men, Lily's motivation in conducting an investigation is because of her own desires. She has curiosity and determined to discover the case by herself. Not only that, Nikki's main motivation in solving the murder case is to help Lily. In fact, Nikki even has a boyfriend named Steve. However, Steve's role is not shown much in the novel. This doesn't mean that Steve is a bad boyfriend. It just shows that Nikki doesn't always have to rely on her boyfriend to do something.

CONCLUSION(S)

In conclusion, Lucinda Grace's *Books and Bribes* shows some women's independence throughout the story. The first one is by having witch as the representation of feminism. While it is not shown often as Lily just discovered her identity not long ago, the witch part of this novel represents women's role in society. Just like women, witch are often seen as a lower existence. However, the witches are also capable of cast spells that are benefiting for them. Their ability to cast spells in this novel could be seen as women's inner strength that they are also capable of doing something driven by their own motivation. This leads to the second discovery. Some of the female characters here have their own love interest. However, this novel never depicted these characters as women who couldn't live without their boyfriends. In fact, except for Gage as he is the deuteragonist in this story, the male characters do not contribute as much as the female characters to the murder case discovery.

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