

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PHALLOCENTRISM AS ILLUSTRATED ON GRACE PALEY'S WANTS

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ABSTRACT

This article would like to expose matter of phallocentrism in short story written by Grace Paley entitled Wants. Phallocentrism itself plays role as the dictations of values of male against female beings. Grace Paley's short story published in 1974 and tells a woman's perspective that is so slow and simple in wanting anything. Her ex-husband has certain dream to be achieved, but she only wants to be a good mother and be happy. Through qualitative method on cultural studies, this paper depicts dictation of a man to his ex-wife. This is in line with dictation of man in phallocentrism theorized by Ernest Jones. The woman actually has done many intangible things, but those meant nothing for the man as he wants tangible ones. The man wants to run but the woman prefers to walk. Both of them are lost in time of being together since the ex-husband's side is too dominant for the ex-wife's part. In conclusion, the short story explains total difference due to radical dominance instead of living dialogues between man and woman.

Keywords: Ernest Jones; Grace Paley; phallocentrism; Wants

INTRODUCTION

Feminism in literature accentuates matter of women's role beyond any men's cultural dictations. Indeed, that matter is closely related to gender as how social structures indicate men and women in such different levels. There is problem of dualism between men and women that wants to be eroded by feminism (Essed et al., 2005; Ogunyemi, 2019). Dualism is how any difference is not equal but hierarchical. The side on the higher level could determine value of other on the lower level. Men are told to be able to state any value for women. Meanwhile,

women could only be objects of such value limited by men (Essed et al., 2005; Wiyatmi, 2012). This situation is known in the concept of phallocentrism as there is such full ability from men to regulate matters of everyday social life including women as its important aspect.

Published in 1974, *Wants* is Grace Paley's short story that shows conflict between a woman and her former husband (Paley, 1998). The friction still continues as aftermath of the divorce. They talk about how the man had big dream ahead while the woman only wanted simple hope. The man gathered more money to buy material things, but the woman hoped for intangible matters. The man sought for hope beyond his own being while the woman only needed to realize small happiness inside the family. The man determined what was good for them but the woman always insisted to be otherwise. In short, the man became so dominant as it ended the marriage itself later.

Then, how is phallocentrism reflects dominance of man to woman in Grace Paley's *Wants*? This paper depicts dictation of a man to his ex-wife. Both of them are lost in time of being together since the ex-husband's side is too dominant for the ex-wife's part. This preeminence is matter of phallocentrism in which total difference between man and woman is shaped due to radical influence of a side to the other. Any further dialogue has become impossible because of total control of the man.

There are several previous studies that have been written regarding the theme of phallocentrism and Paley's story of *Wants*. The first is done by Tom Boyle in 2021 entitled *Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations in Grace Paley's Wants* (Boyle, 2021). This article speaks about semiotic aspects used in the short story and how structuralism shape the meanings in the story. The similarity of that article with this paper is the short story while the difference lies on the perspective being used. The second one is composed by Tanguy Berenger in 2015 entitled "*I don't understand how time passes*": *The Experience of Time in Grace Paley's "Wants" and "Ruthy and Edie"* (Berenger, 2015). This article underlines how the characters speak of time and how they experience the fluidity of temporality. Berenger's article employs Paley's short story too, but the difference is on the emphasis being articulated.

The third one is written by Smriti Sneh in 2022 entitled *Men Without Women: Exploring the Literal and Literary Phallocentrism in Murakami's Works* (Sneh, 2022). This article underscores the male gaze against female beings in Murakami's novels and anthology of short stories. Sneh uses the same perspective of phallocentrism similar to this paper, but the difference is the object being employed. The fourth one is done by Emre Say in 2024 entitled *Psychoanalytic Reflections on Phallocentrism and Colonialism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* (Say, 2024). Say's paper puts the same idea of phallocentrism compared to this article, yet the difference is on the object of short story.

From four previous studies above, the novelty of this article is clear. The main idea is to bring the idea of phallocentrism to the short story of *Wants* that is never been analyzed before. Moreover, it also emphasizes the role of Paley as a woman writer that employs more to femininity aspects in her literary work. Furthermore, the perspective of the victim from the woman side is more indicated in this paper.

METHODS

By using qualitative method, correlations between Grace Paley's *Wants* and phallocentrism point of view by Ernest Jones alongside literary concepts and gender ideas are explored. The data collection technique used is closed reading by indicating various patterns of phallocentrism in the story. The data analysis technique used is content analysis that includes attaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references lists. The research data comes from both Paley's short story and Jones' arguments. Paley's short story is the object while Jones' idea is a tool to analyze.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Conflictual Ideas of Man and Woman in Grace Paley's Short Story

This part underlines the data of prolonging conflicts within the man and woman. The story of *Wants* talks about the relationship of the main character with her past and her thoughts regarding time, marriage and herself (Paley, 1998). Her past is portrayed by the books she holds on to, the one that she tried to return to the library after eighteen years of keeping it. Before entering the library, she met her ex-husband outside and greeted him nicely. However, the man replied fiercely. She wants to evade any bad arguments but that awkward situation still comes. The situation is seen in the following quotation;

"I saw my ex-husband in the street. I was sitting on the steps of the new library.

Hello, my life, I said. We had once been married for twenty-seven years, so I felt justified.

He said, What? What life? No life of mine.

I said, O.K. I don't argue when there's real disagreement." (Paley, 1998)

The main character finally returns the book which costs her \$32 for eighteen years of late return. She says that she does not even deny anything since

she has the book in her hand. She intends to say that she is lost in her own time even if she always thinks of the book. She does not even understand how the time works. In this case, it shows how she wants to do something but she could never realize her own thought into real action. It is shown in following citation;

"I got up and went into the library to see how much I owed them. The librarian said \$32 even and you've owed it for eighteen years. I didn't deny anything. Because I don't understand how time passes. I have had those books. I have often thought of them. The library is only two blocks away." (Paley, 1998)

Although administratively she is forgiven by the librarian, her ex-husband on the other hand still clings on to the past marriage they used to have. He tells her things he remembered they have shared together as a couple. They start to talk about how she never invited other people to dinner where she clarifies by detailed agenda. She commemorates many detailed timelines in their former marriage, while the man only recalls to certain big-impacted matters. That conflict is continued from the above greeting in front of the library as shown in the following;

"That's possible, I said. But really, if you remember: first, my father was sick that Friday, then the children were born, then I had those Tuesday-night meetings, then the war began. Then we didn't seem to know them anymore. But you're right. I should have had them to dinner."

A nice thing I do remember is breakfast, my ex-husband said. I was surprised. All we ever had was coffee. Then I remembered there was a hole in the back of the kitchen closet which opened into the apartment next door. There, they always ate sugar-cured smoked bacon. It gave us a very grand feeling about breakfast, but we never got stuffed and sluggish." (Paley, 1998)

The two then proceed and talk about what they have wanted in life. Her ex-husband pointed out that he wanted a sailboat while she wanted nothing at all throughout their marriage. She always thanks for every single condition that they had together, but he always complains about how he could never reach his own wants. Then, he gave her harsh comment, as the apex of the conflict between them two, before he left her afterward. He wanted material things while she only needed intangible matters. It is in the following quotation;

*"That was when we were poor, I said.
When were we ever rich? he asked."*

Oh, as time went on, as our responsibilities increased, we didn't go in need. You took adequate financial care, I reminded him. The children went to camp four weeks a year and in decent ponchos with sleeping bags and boots, just like everyone else. They looked very nice. Our place was warm in winter, and we had nice red pillows and things.

I wanted a sailboat, he said. But you didn't want anything. Don't be bitter, I said. It's never too late.

No, he said with a great deal of bitterness. I may get a sailboat. As a matter of fact, I have money down on an eighteen-foot two-rigger. I'm doing well this year and can look forward to better. But as for you, it's too late. You'll always want nothing." (Paley, 1998)

Then, she says how she was dominated by him. His words are so harsh to her that those went down directly to her heart. She feels choked all the time and what he has done is disappearing. And then, he did it again by leaving her standing alone in front of the library. Here is the quotation;

"He had had a habit throughout the twenty-seven years of making a narrow remark which, like a plumber's snake, could work its way through the ear down the throat, half-way to my heart. He would then disappear, leaving me choking with equipment. What I mean is, I sat down on the library steps and he went away." (Paley, 1998)

She tries to look back on the good old days and to remember what she actually wants. On the contrary with her ex-husband's desire, she actually has her own preferences. She wants to be a different person. A woman who will return the books she borrowed right on time. It is asserted in the following;

*"I looked through *The House of Mirth*, but lost interest. I felt extremely accused. Now, it's true, I'm short of requests and absolute requirements. But I do want something. I want, for instance, to be a different person. I want to be the woman who brings these two books back in two weeks." (Paley, 1998)*

Her wants follow as she also wants to change bigger social structure. She starts from small wants then she hopes for bigger dreams to be achieved. She wants to change the school system in the urban center and to end war before her kids grow up. As in marriage, she wanted to be married forever to one person. She has decided that despite being 'late' as what her ex-husband pointed out

before, she will make a change needed to become a different person started by returning back the book she borrowed. Here is the quotation;

"I want to be the woman who brings these two books back in two weeks. I want to be the effective citizen who changes the school system and addresses the Board of Estimate on the troubles of this dear urban center.

I had promised my children to end the war before they grew up.

I wanted to have been married forever to one person, my ex-husband or my present one. Either has enough character for a whole life, which as it turns out is really not such a long time. You couldn't exhaust either man's qualities or get under the rock of his reasons in one short life."(Paley, 1998)

She just wants to be a simple person who could watch time moves on. She wants to be better like the sycamore that grows up since being planted a long time ago. At the time, she understands her conflict with her ex-husband. They have their own different wants. She tries to mend the relationship but the man refuses. Even in the end of the marriage, the man is still dominant over her. She feels so small but she believes that by doing more action, she could shape better life out of his former marriage. It is illustrated in the following quotation;

"Just this morning I looked out the window to watch the street for a while and saw that the little sycamores the city had dreamily planted a couple of years before the kids were born had come that day to the prime of their lives.

Well! I decided to bring those two books back to the library. Which proves that when a person or an event comes along to jolt or appraise me I can take some appropriate action, although I am better known for my hospitable remarks." (Paley, 1998)

The short story from Paley indicates how conflictual ideas could shape such serious consequences. In this story, the divorce and its prolonged frictions are what she has to bear to her future life. The husband does not even care about her anymore. He has moved on into better realization of his wants, while she has to rethink about her own conditions. It is interesting since doer usually introspects what she or he has done before. However, in this story, the victim must bear that action by considering what should be fixed later on. His dominance is still over her, even after the marriage ended. She has many wants, yet she has just realized that appropriate action must be done to overcome any hesitation (Paley, 1998).

Phallocentrism and Its Discontent

This part signifies any concept, discourse, and theory used to explore idea of phallocentrism in Paley's story. The perception of phallocentrism comes from the word phallus which in psychoanalytic theory serves supreme symbol of masculinity that includes the power and the lack of feminine (Campbell, 2000; Jones, 1948; Rine, 2010). Indeed, the term involves dualism of hierarchy in which man is considered better than woman in every single aspect of life. Aside from being the symbol of masculinity, phallus is source of life of the world (Danielou, 1995; Grogan, 2013). The urge of masculinity tends to deliver men into abusing their power towards women. The cultural construction imposes women as the main victims but also the most blamable sides. The definition of phallocentrism according to Ernest Jones is that he objects the notion of sexual enjoyment and total accentuation of how penis envy in women (Campbell, 2000; Jones, 1948; Picard, 2001). This is due to such normalized condition that men could always dictate any meaning for women since they are naturally capable of doing so.

The concept of phallocentrism asserts behavior and characteristic of men but also its discontent. The representation of men are falsely shown as universal and abstract focusing on the norms for all humanity (Al-Fartoosi, 2021; Jones, 1958; Rine, 2010). The term initially explains matter of dictation from man to woman while it also indicates such crucial criticism to that former matter. The main criticism for that concept is the existence of phallus as a symbolic sense where it become the prime signifier and the source of power (Grogan, 2013; Joodaki & Vajdi, 2013). The male domination is depicted as an active hero that saves female victim who is always passive. Women are illustrated as exhibit of sexual activity, libido, desires, and drives for pleasure and the decision to be perverse (Bonnici, 1998; Picard, 2001). Meanwhile, man always intercepts and realizes any dream imagined by woman. He is considered the one and only entity that could make everything into life.

Moreover, criticism against phallocentrism also comes from feminism that criticizes matter of knowledge totally owned by men. Feminist argues that there is contention that philosophy is gendered masculine and unable to examine women's matters constructively (Bonnici, 1998). Woman is always denied to enter better understandings with man. That phenomenon of denial of identity also reduces the qualities of feminine image of women's real identity and independent nature (Al-Fartoosi, 2021; Ogunyemi, 2019). In this case, phallus is the main cause which determines both matters of sexual conditions and gender roles. Penis envy asserts sexual nature that female body holds lesser version of the male. In the ancient Greeks, they divine that human is seen as the most perfect life for and men are perfect than women (Danielou, 1995; Libbon, 2007). Gender roles are also ruled by man who is recognized to be more superior to woman. All of values are measured from mere masculine traits while feminine could only

follow its further certainties. It also builds worse consequences in how society treats double standards to man and woman (Joodaki & Vajdi, 2013; Wilson, 2003).

Phallogocentrism is also closely related to phallogocentrism. The main difference is the word *logos* that shows matter of sign of language. While phallogocentrism focuses on the phallus, phallogocentrism accentuates language assigned to the superior and the inferior (Joodaki & Vajdi, 2013). There is no place for free-value in language as it always concerns idea of power-related. Here, man is considered as ultimate bringer of sameness whose aggressiveness controls meaning of everything (Libbon, 2007; Wilson, 2003). That dictation indeed applies to woman who speaks as otherness as sub-ordinance of the superior one. Main criticism to phallogocentrism remains in how being inferior is needed as total complementary to the superior one (Joodaki & Vajdi, 2013; Kleiner, 2009). Femininity indeed is crucial for definition of masculinity. However, the relationship between them is not equal at all since choices are given as a gift from man to woman. Female's passiveness and weakness are not from her own identity but it is intended by man (Jones, 1948; Wilson, 2003). Women's responsibility to bear children and to take care of the family are not a self-choice, but as their own destinies. Therefore, the idea that comes to surface is self-alienation in phallogocentrism rather than self-realization (Joodaki & Vajdi, 2013; Shao, 2022).

In advance, the matter of phallogocentrism also asserts posture of consciousness. Consciousness is not monolithic at all nor could it define itself as seen in modern conception. Such awareness is intentional only regarding man as the main control of any kind of value (Macleod, 2007; Wilson, 2003). Feminism as the opposite of phallogocentrism sounds the idea of how woman must be aware of her own condition without being hindered by male's total indication. Woman should hear herself as she is the main owner of her own power. In a case, idea of maternal passion by Julia Kristeva pays attention to woman not as intermediary but the main cause of life itself (Shao, 2022; Yuliastuti et al., 2021). By taking points on the eyes of woman, asymmetrical condition included in phallogocentrism could be eroded. While hierarchical dualism looks for man as the main control, duality takes place on symmetrical understandings between man and woman. It may not be totally equal as 50:50 but it could shape better inter-subjectivity to understand another better, not to undermine the other worse (Al-Fartoosi, 2021; Jones, 1958).

In phallogocentrism, man is recognized as a whole while woman is fragmented. Parts of woman are told as complementary for masculine being. This idea is generalized and even normalized through collective consciousness either (Gustafson, 2017; Macleod, 2007). It is shown in how gender bias works. A woman is indicated as if her sexual conditions define everything including her

major competencies. That is also reflected on man as the privileged subject while woman is the undermined object as explained through gender discriminations. Woman is viewed as dependent entity to man while man is independent and could define himself through patriarchal system (Libbon, 2007; Ogunyemi, 2019). Matter of phallogocentrism is not only between man and woman as individuals but it includes societal matters where gender roles take place. Indeed, matter of phallus is about sexual reality but its application in phallogocentrism involves wider communal circumstances on male-dominated societies (Libbon, 2007; Macleod, 2007).

Conception of criticism to phallogocentrism extends to matter of post-modernism, post-structuralism, and even post-colonialism. In post-modernism, the phallic idea is opposed ultimately as cause of grand narration of modernism (Campbell, 2000; Gustafson, 2017). It shapes every single idea of binary opposition and sharpen differences through dualism. It regards otherness only as object to main sameness as the subject (Düzgün, 2020; Lam, 2020). Post-structuralism retracts matters of women's oppression to phallogocentrism as an ideology that tightly binds human beings without any other choice. The old structure of steep dissimilarities between man and women must be eradicated through deconstruction of epistemic perspectives.

Sexual and gender identities are not natural at all, but constructed through phallogocentric language. The knowledge is not equal for all, but merely from one main side to all sides (Kleiner, 2009; Lam, 2020). The discourse of the dictation from the father is opposed with idea of otherness of the mother. Post-colonialism is more critical in seeing expanded capitalism is the main cause to such phallogocentric determinations. The sign is quite fixed while the signifier could move along by itself. Woman as the sign will never be signifier (Kleiner, 2009; Picard, 2001). It must be changed by shifting further perspective to the other side. Essentialism must be broken down through prolonging process to show existential matters of various identities. Those who are hidden should come to surface by their own definitions out of any total determinations from main power (Düzgün, 2020; Gustafson, 2017). All of those three streams of recent knowledge culminate to demands of further understanding, equality, and reciprocity from masculine to feminine matters.

Dictation beyond Dialogue and Its Effects to Self

This part explores the analysis of perspective of phallogocentrism in short story of *Wants*. In this short story, Paley gives an illustration on how men's desires are told to be much more accountable rather than women's (Paley, 1998). She underlines desire as center of matter in the story. There are different desires between the two characters; the ex-wife and her ex-husband. The ex-wife is always blamed for her slow desire. Meanwhile, the ex-husband is full of desire

of having abundant things dictated to her. The woman actually has done many intangible things, but those meant nothing for the man as he wants tangible ones (Paley, 1998). The man wants to run but the woman prefers to walk. Both of them are lost in time of being together since the ex-husband's side is too dominant for the ex-wife's part.

The short story explains total difference between man and woman due to radical dominance of a side to the other. There is critical point on dominant dictation by the man towards the woman. The ex-husband used to corner the ex-wife about small things, for instance about invitation for the Bertrams for dinner (Paley, 1998). It is not clear who the Bertrams are, but the conversation points to the accusation of problem in the marriage that actually comes from the ex-wife. Another part shows the ex-husband's desire to have better breakfast like their neighbor (Paley, 1998). He envies the neighbor next door by saying how he speaks his mind on how beautiful the neighbor's life is instead of his. The desire of the ex-husband is full of bad accusation to the ex-wife. It slowly dictates the ex-wife as she starts to accept the victimization she has received for a long time in the broken marriage.

Actually, the ex-wife says that she wants things that not only impact her personally, but for others as well especially her children. She wants more intangible things, but he wants more realistic things. He wants a sailboat, for example, and blames the ex-wife for wanting nothing (Paley, 1998). The ex-husband thinks that the real desires only accountable when something could be touched, spoken out, and seen as realistic. The notion of phallocentrism shown from what the ex-husband's says is how determined he is about getting the boat or the desire he wish to be fulfilled (Paley, 1998). Yet, at the end of his sentence, he judges the ex-wife on the life that she might live on the assumption of having no desire. His ego dominates his mindset on what a desire should be then it spreads to drive the ex-wife's desire either. The man always urges to monopolize matters of cultural values, including his wife as part of his belongings (Grogan, 2013; Lam, 2020).

About desire, each person has own preference in life. Some people might focus on most of their desire in material things (Bonnici, 1998; Danielou, 1995). Some others might focus on something psychological than the tangible one. In this short story, there are differences between what the ex-wife wants and what the ex-husband's wants. It is interesting how Paley shows wants as desire of human beings. The desire is not autonomous at all, but truly comes from one's deep unconscious thoughts (Essed et al., 2005; Gustafson, 2017). When it comes to certain realization, a desire must face another that will bring in further conflict. As a conflict goes, a side is more dominant than another. The dominance comes furthermore beyond any dialogue. Desire must be fulfilled at once without any

compromise even if it must destroy others (Jones, 1948; Rine, 2010). In this case, the ex-wife is the one who is abused by the ex's husband's desire.

The ex-husband truly points out that he wants a sailboat or in this case a subject of his own desire. Meanwhile, the ex-wife wants more into psychological issues such as on how she wants changes (Paley, 1998). She wants changes that not only for herself as a human being, but also for the sake of the world. She wants to change the system that has been going on in the world such as education. She also wants to stop the war, something that probably what people want during the era. However, those noble desire of hers must nod to the ex-husband's wants of material things. What she wants will never be equally compared to what he wants, but she has to follow him as she is part of the marriage (Paley, 1998). She must agree to all things that he wants as he is the ruler of meaning the family. She must face phallocentrism from his husband throughout the marriage.

Besides, what the ex-husband wants actually affects personality of the ex-wife. She could not realize any matter of the time passes by. She still takes care of her children, but she forgets how to be happy and to realize what she really desires. She could no longer recognize herself beside what the ex-husband dictates to her. Her knowledge will never extend although she reads books. Her self has changed not by her own understanding of the world, but by crucial dominance of the man against her (Wilson, 2003). She is only considered as fragmented even though she is a whole that could determine her own self in advance. Her recognition to herself is language from the ex-husband. She does not have voice to sound her own language (Kleiner, 2009). She is hindered by the man's domination on phallocentrism.

CONCLUSION

The portrayal of women in literature sometimes being seen as someone who are weak and incomplete. The idea of phallocentrism supports that idea through understanding of superiority of male due to the presence of the phallus. In Paley's short story, the ex-husband dictates and dominates the ex-wife from the idea of wants. The ex-husband wants tangible things, but the ex-wife wants more noble desire. However, she must follow what he wants every time without even considering herself as a whole person. This is reflected in matter of phallocentrism that needs to be refused since it prolongs man's domination to woman. Man should not monopolize knowledge and force it to woman being. Desire is presence of human being so that it should be appreciated rather than dominated.

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