

Feminism Analysis in the Novel “The Blue Castle” by L.M. Montgomery

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ABSTRACT

Feminism was a movement that seeks justice, liberation and equality between men and women in all areas advocating for women's rights and priorities. In addition, the role of female characters was often portrayed as oppressed individuals compared to men, including in their work, education, and roles in society. This research used a qualitative descriptive method. The novel “The Blue Castle” told the story of a woman named Valency Stirling in the face of oppression and pressure in her family and society. This research described feminism, the struggle of a woman in fighting for her rights contained in the novel. The purpose of this study was to explore the theory of feminism and raise awareness of social issues, especially for women in society. The results of this study found forms of injustice or oppression in the family/society to Valency, the courage to live a free life, and the awareness that makes Valency happier with her life based on the perspective of feminism.

I. Introduction

According to Wollstonecraft, feminist theory explains that a woman must be independent, intelligent, and honest to hold authority. Wollstonecraft's opinion on the value of women is often trivialized in literature, novels, and the education system [1]. In a philosophical context, according to Wollstonecraft, all individuals have the same moral value, regardless of gender, race, creed or religion. Freedom and rights are essential for both men and women, so wisdom cannot exist without freedom. Wollstonecraft believed that if women were not free, society would only be flawed [2]. Feminism discusses the strengths and weaknesses of woman in facing social pressures, as well as the physical and psychological identity of women in the novel [3].

The women's movement continues to be the subject of endless discussions. With women are often an infinite source of inspiration. In various colonial areas, women also felt the impact of colonialism, which triggered them to take action of resistance to protect their interests. However, men often underestimate women's movements due to a lack of confidence in women's ability to struggle. As a result, women have experienced various forms of injustice throughout history because they are considered incapable of resisting [4]. In today's modern era, women are beginning to realize and demand fairer treatment in all areas of life, but the development of feminism has finally encouraged more women to voice their rights as independent human beings, one of which is delaying or even refusing marriage and limiting the number of children and some even refuse to have children and they focus more on a brilliant career or becoming an independent moment [5]

Feminism is one of the concepts of a literary work that means a study that directs the focus of its analysis on women. If it has been assumed that the readers and creators of Western literature are men, feminist literary criticism shows that female readers bring perceptions and expectations into their literary experience. Literary works that tell of injustices against women are often told in the form of novels [6]

In human life, literature or novels are very important part of culture in helping humans to understand and adapt to the interactions, expressions, and views of different people [7]. The term 'novel' in literature can now be applied to a wide variety of prose works, especially in the modern era. 'Novel' as a genre is difficult to define because of its open-endedness and flexibility. A novel is a type of literary work in the form of prose that has intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Novels are generally greater in length and complexity than short stories, and are not bound by structural or rhyme constraints. Usually, novels tell or describe human life in relation to the environment and interactions with others. According to Drs. Rostamaji, a novel is a literary work that consists of two elements, namely intrinsic and extrinsic elements, which are interconnected and influence each other in a literary work [8]. Important points in the story are usually written from a life experience and problems, because a fictional novel must be able to be an interesting story, remain a coherent structure, and also certainly still have an aesthetic purpose.

A novel can be described as a creative arrangement of various social speech styles, often including multiple languages and distinct individual voices[5]. This research examines the novel "The Blue Castle" which tells the story of women's struggle to pursue freedom, especially in a very conservative and patriarchal society. Women deserve the opportunity to find happiness in their own way. In feminist theory, through the character of Valancy Stirling, the novel teaches the importance of courage to fight against social oppression and pursue true freedom [9].

Literary appreciation is the process of evaluating, analyzing, and understanding literary works to enjoy the beauty, moral, and intellectual values in them. Also Literary appreciation is the process a reader goes through to understand a literary work. It involves interpreting the meanings within the work. To appreciate a piece of literature, a person must first understand its structure and the way it's organized, as these form the foundation of the work's presentation and meaning. Readers dive deeper into the meaning of the text, including themes, language style, structure, and the social and cultural context that influenced the work. The goal is to enrich the understanding of the message, beauty, and contribution of literature in understanding people and life [10]. Literary appreciation involves reading, comprehending, and critically evaluating aspects such as theme, style, the use of figurative and non-figurative language, and other elements within a literary work. Without this process, it becomes challenging to claim that one has truly engaged with or understood the text [11].

The purpose of analyzing "The Blue Castle" using feminist theory is to explore and interpret the themes of feminism found in the story. This article focuses on how the main character, Valancy Stirling, defies the gender norms of her time, and how she finds freedom and self-identity through actions that are considered unorthodox for a woman of her era. As such, this article explores Valancy's attempts to free herself from familial control and societal pressures in order to live as she sees fit [12]. It illustrates the struggle for female emancipation in a repressive environment. The article also discusses how Valancy, along with other characters, portrays or defies traditional gender stereotypes. For example, how Valancy dares to take steps that were considered "unfit" for women at that time. An analysis of feminism in "The Blue Castle" can show how Valancy's journey of self-discovery symbolizes women's struggle to define their own identity, free from the restrictive norms of society[13].

Through this analysis, the article also addresses the critique of patriarchal societal structures and encourages readers to question assumptions about women's roles in society. By analyzing the novel through the lens of feminism, the article provides a deeper understanding of how the literary work reflects, opposes, or supports feminist ideas and social change, and raises readers' awareness of gender issues that are still relevant today [6].

Based on the description above, the author is interested in analyzing the theory of feminism in the novel The Blue Castle because it contains narratives or sentences that discuss feminism. The purpose of this research is to analyze the narratives or sentences in a literary work, especially the novel "The Blue Castle" [14].

II. Method

In the study of novels, a descriptive qualitative approach is often chosen because this approach allows the researcher to understand the meaning contained in the text, themes, characters, and settings in the novel in depth [15]. This is especially important in literary works, where analysis focuses on the interpretation of symbols, emotions, and cultural values. Descriptive qualitative allows researchers to provide a detailed description of what theories we can analyze in the novel [16]. This research does not just look at statistical data, but explores how the narrative and characters develop in the story. Novels often have specific social and cultural settings. This approach helps researchers interpret the content of the story in that context, making it easier to understand how those elements interrelate in the narrative [10]. In this study, the data examined are the elements of Feminism in the novel "The Blue Castle" by L.M. Montgomery so that using descriptive qualitative research to be able to obtain and describe the data of feminism theory in the novel [6].

III. Results and Discussion

The novel "The Blue Castle" offers more than just a compelling narrative for readers. On the first page, a story that raises the theme of feminism at the beginning is presented. The story in this novel focuses on a woman named Valency Stirling, who is a woman from an upper-middle-class family who was never allowed to work because of the social norms that existed in her time.

For many women of that era, they only had a purpose in life that was often associated with getting married and having children. However, at the age of 29, Valency had to face a bad judgment as a "hopeless old virgin" in a community that viewed single women only as those who "failed to get a man." Her life is limited to caring for her elderly mother, with no real direction or meaning. Valency feels trapped by society's expectations of how a woman should behave, and she can't bear to live a life filled with fear and gloom about the future[17].

In this novel, Valency is portrayed as someone who finds genuine happiness in life. The Blue Castle inspires readers with the idea that a woman can fully embrace a relationship built on mutual trust, self-respect, and shared joy in life's adventures. This message remains as relevant and meaningful today as it was when the book was first written.

As quoted in her statement that:

1. Valency experienced oppression and pressure

"Twenty-nine," Uncle Benjamin was saying. "Dear me, Doss, you're dangerously near the second corner and not even thinking of getting married yet. Twentynine. It seems impossible." Then Uncle Benjamin said an original thing. Uncle Benjamin said, "How time does fly!" (*page 20 chapter 5*).

Yes, it was just twenty, Valency reflected, since she had first been tweeted with her loverless condition. She remembered the bitter moment perfectly. She was just nine years old and she was standing alone on the school playground while the other little girls of her class were playing a game in which you must be chosen by a boy as his partner before you could play. Nobody had chosen Valency little, pale, black-haired Valency, with her prim, long-sleeved apron and odd, slanted eyes (*page 21 chapter 5*).

This quote is an early depiction of Valency's socially oppressive life for not conforming to the standards of female beauty and appropriateness of her time. Through narratives like this, L.M. Montgomery criticizes how patriarchal societies often judge women based solely on their appearance and relationship status. The novel then explores Valency's journey towards independence and freedom, where she finally breaks away from restrictive norms.

Through feminist analysis, we can see that L.M. Montgomery not only tells a personal story, but also performs a social critique of women's roles and expectations in the early 20th century.

2. Rebellion against Gender Expectations

In a patriarchal society, Valency is treated as if her life is nothing more than fulfilling family expectations. However, by rebelling against traditional gender roles, Valency chooses not to follow the pattern of life prescribed for her.

“Why do I have to live the way they want me to? Why can't I live the way I want?”
(page 39 and chapter 8)

This dialog shows the turning point in the story where Valency begins to wonder why she has to continue to adhere to expectations that never bring her happiness. Valency starts to make bold decisions to change her life, in the middle chapters of the story, after she learns of her illness. Discusses an important part of Valency's journey of self-discovery. This internal rebellion reflects her growing realization that her existence has been shaped by societal and family pressures rather than her own aspirations. This realization is triggered by the diagnosis of an illness that makes her life time limited and so Valency decides to pursue her own happiness. There are several rebellions undertaken, as she moves out of her oppressive family home, accepts a position that scandalizes her relatives, and finally marries for the sake of friendship and love, not societal approval. Through these choices, Valency challenges traditional gender roles, defying the expectation that women should live solely for others.

Montgomery uses Valency's defiance to criticize the limitations placed on women in a patriarchal society. By reclaiming her autonomy, Valency not only reshapes her own life, but also symbolizes a broader call for women's freedom to live authentically, free from society's restrictions.

3. Freedom and Change Valency

At the end of the novel, Valency talks to Barney after the two decide to live together, without feeling bound by social norms or family pressures. In this moment, a major change in Valency is clearly visible, where she fully embraces freedom and chooses to follow the path of life that she has set for herself. (page 130-131 and chapter 28)

Valency: "I don't care what people think of me anymore, Barney. I've wasted too many years worrying about it. I'm not going to live my life for anyone else but myself."

This statement describes Valency's transformation that manages to free herself from the shackles of other people's views and expectations. He is fully aware that his life is his own, and he has the right to determine his happiness without being bound by the rules or norms that have been limiting him.

Barney's statement, “I have always admired your courage, Valency. You are a woman who knows what she wants and has the courage to take it,” expresses his admiration.

Barney expresses his admiration for Valency's transformation, who has evolved from a repressed woman to a courageous and independent individual. She started off as a woman confined by societal expectations and family domination, unable to express her desires or opinions. Her transformation began with the realization of her mortality, which drove her to break free from these restrictions. By choosing to live authentically, Valency defies the norms that previously constrained her life. She rejects the notion that her value lies solely in fulfilling traditional roles and embraces her individuality, even if it invites criticism or scandal.

Barney's admiration not only reflects his growing affection for Valency, but also his respect for her newfound independence and courage. Valency's journey generates the idea that personal freedom and self-determination are acts of courage, especially for women in a patriarchal society. Her words validate the changing power of reclaiming one's agency, even in the face of societal opposition.

Through Barney's words and Valency's actions, Montgomery celebrates the courage it takes to live life on her own terms, presenting Valency as an inspiring figure who challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations.

IV. Conclusion

The Blue Castle is a recommended novel for readers, especially those who want to enjoy an engaging and memorable story that combines commentary on social issues with entertaining storytelling. This study concludes that L.M. Montgomery effectively utilizes Valency Stirling's story in The Blue Castle to inspire readers by focusing on the power of self-determination and the courage needed to confront deeply rooted societal norms. Valency's journey from a submissive and oppressed individual to a liberated and independent woman is a major and interesting topic to inspire readers, who are critical of the restrictive gender roles and patriarchal expectations of her time. Through Valency's journey, Montgomery highlights the struggles many women face in a society that values conformity over individuality. The novel critiques society's tendency to determine a woman's worth based on her appearance, marital status, and adherence to traditional roles, depicting these norms as significant barriers to personal fulfilment.

After reading, understanding, classifying and analyzing all the data, the researcher concluded that the novel "The Blue Castle" by L.M. Montgomery that there are several points that can be used as an outline of feminism theory in the novel, namely Social Pressure and Oppression, where Valency lives under patriarchal social standards that judge women based on appearance and marital status. then Rebellion against Gender Expectations, When Valency realizes that her life has been determined by family and community pressure, she decides to rebel and Freedom and Self-Change at the end of the story, Valency completely frees herself from social expectations. She accepts her identity, determines her own path, and chooses happiness over the opinions of others.

From the results of the analysis, it can be concluded these three points reflect feminist ideas that emphasize women's liberation from oppression, rejection of gender stereotypes, and search for freedom and self-identity. This study emphasizes that author Montgomery not only provides a personal story of liberation, but also conveys a broader critique of the systemic inequalities that perpetuate gender-based oppression or gender inequality. The researcher concludes that Valency's journey serves as a call for women to embrace their individuality and assert their right to live the life they deserve, free from expectations imposed by others.

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