



The Oppression of Women in the Fairy Tale Frau Holle: A Feminist Literary Critique

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Abstract

The Feminism is a belief that men and women should have equal rights in politics, society, sexuality, intellect, and economics. Feminism encompasses movements, theories, philosophies, and everything related to gender equality with the goal of achieving justice for women. Women's Oppression has been a theme in many forms of literature including fairy tales. One of the famous fairy tales is Frau Holle, a fairy tale originating from Germany and collected by the Grimm Brothers in their collection entitled Children's and Household Tales (Kinder- und Hausmärchen). The formulation of the problem in this study is how is the oppression of women in the fairy tale Frau Holle? The purpose of this research is to analyze how the oppression of women in Frau Holle's fairy tales. The research method in this study is a qualitative method with content analysis techniques. There is oppression of women in this fairy tale which is done by differentiating women based on gender stereotypes, injustice in treatment, coercion and violence, and rewards and punishments. Based on the results of the analysis of Frau Holle's fairy tale, there are elements of oppression against women by teaching that women must follow certain rules to be appreciated, while those who do not obey the rules will be punished.

Keywords: *Feminism, Frau Holle's Tale, Women's Oppression*

Abstrak

Feminisme adalah sebuah pemikiran bahwa laki – laki dan perempuan harus memiliki hak yang sama dalam hal politik, sosial, seksual, intelektual, dan ekonomi. Feminisme mencakup gerakan, teori, filosofi, dan segala sesuatu yang berkaitan dengan masalah kesetaraan gender dengan tujuan mencapai keadilan bagi Perempuan. Penindasan Perempuan telah menjadi tema dalam berbagai bentuk sastra termasuk dongeng. Salah satu dongeng yang terkenal adalah *Frau Holle*, sebuah dongeng yang berasal dari Jerman dan dikumpulkan oleh Grimm Bersaudara dalam koleksi mereka yang berjudul Children's and Household Tales (Kinder- und Hausmärchen). Rumusan masalah pada penelitian ini adalah bagaimana penindasan Perempuan dalam dongeng *Frau Holle* ? Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis bagaimana penindasan Perempuan dalam dongeng *Frau Holle*. Metode penelitian dalam penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif dengan teknik analisis isi. Terdapat penindasan Perempuan dalam dongeng ini yang dilakukan dengan cara pembedaan Perempuan berdasarkan stereotip gender, ketidakadilan dalam perlakuan, pemaksaan dan kekerasan, dan penghargaan dan hukuman. Berdasarkan hasil analisis terhadap terhadap dongeng *Frau Holle* terdapat unsur penindasan terhadap perempuan dengan mengajarkan bahwa perempuan harus mengikuti aturan tertentu untuk bisa dihargai, sementara yang tidak mentaati peraturan akan dihukum.

Kata Kunci: feminisme, dongeng Frau Holle, Penindasan Perempuan

INTRODUCTION

The Feminism is a belief that men and women should have equal rights in politics, society, sexuality, intellect, and economics. Feminism encompasses movements, theories, philosophies, and everything related to gender equality with the goal of achieving justice for women (Ilaa, 2021). Gender refers to masculine and feminine in the socio-cultural context of society (Ahmadi, 2024). It is closely related to gender equality because gender is not just a matter of biological sex (male or female), but a social construction that assigns certain roles, norms and expectations to men and women in society. Feminism is a women's movement aimed at freeing women from socially, economically, and politically disadvantageous situations (Saraswati, 2013:41). As stated by (Aizid, 2024:4), feminism is not only about women experiencing discrimination or injustice, but also about gender rights and equality in various aspects of life. While criticizing the patriarchal system that governs society today, the feminist movement seeks to build a fair social structure. With the emergence of the feminist movement, it is believed that the status of women will improve in society (Malik dkk., 2023). Feminism can be found in various literary works. Literary works originate from the thoughts and cultural representations of different groups within society; therefore, literary works often tell stories about the interaction between humans and their environment (Logita, 2019) . Literature has beautiful meanings and contains moral values expressed in beautiful language (Rifdah, 2023). Indonesian literature is divided into two periods: the old and new periods. One example of old literature is fairy tales. Fairy tales are oral literature that combines various events or incidents that are unlikely to occur. The characters in fairy tales are generally animals, humans, and gods. Additionally, there are some fairy tales that feature female characters (Oftavia et al., 2023). Fairy tales featuring female characters often have less dominant roles compared to male characters. Although there are some fairy tales with strong and influential female characters, in general, male characters are still often portrayed as the center of power or influence in the story. Fairy tales are folk stories that are not considered real events. Fairy tales are told for entertainment, although many fairy tales contain truths, moral lessons, and satire (Rukiyah, 2018). (Habsari, 2017) also revealed that fairy tales are fictional stories written for entertainment purposes and contain moral values. The content of fairy tales can be divided into four types, namely (1) legends: stories that are considered real because they tell about the origins of a place, customs, and so on; (2) fables; magical stories with animal characters that act like humans; (3) myths; stories that tell about beliefs of a community that cannot be proven to be true; (4) folk tales: stories that have been

passed down from generation to generation and have become an integral part of culture darikebudayaan (Puspitasari & Jupri, 2018:30-32). In real life, women are often perceived as weak and less prominent in everyday life (Larasati, 2024) . Women also frequently experience discrimination, which makes them more vulnerable to various forms of violence, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment. Discrimination can make women targets of violence due to power imbalances or unfair treatment (Wisiani et al., 2024). Gender inequality will benefit one party and harm the other. Men are the ones who benefit the most (Ahmadi, 2021) . According to Al-Ghammaz (Alkhatib, 2024) , women must seek freedom from slavery and safety from the prisons they have entered, and this will never happen without struggle.

One feminist theory that highlights the oppression of women is Marxist feminism. Marxist feminism has its roots in the 19th century and was influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Taufik, 2020). This movement highlights the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, viewing oppression against women as stemming from exploitative economic structures. Marxist feminism flourished in the 20th century, focusing on issues such as domestic labor, wage inequality, and women's roles in production, demanding systemic change to achieve gender equality. The goal of Marxist feminism is to ensure that men and women can work together to build social structures and social roles that allow both genders to maximize their human potential. Marxist feminism views capitalism as a relationship of power exploitation. According to this school of thought, women's thinking and nature are shaped by women's work. In addition, Marxist feminism views capitalism as a system of relationships and exchange relations (Urfan & Irma, 2023) . Marxist feminism is a feminist approach that examines the oppression of women through the lens of economics and social class (Pahlevi et al., 2022). The basic concept emphasizes that patriarchy is closely related to capitalism, in which women are exploited as cheap labor and domestic workers are not paid. The oppression of women has been a problem that exists in various times and often takes the form of narratives that reinforce gender stereotypes. The social relationships of caste and gender reflect the oppression of women, where power is maintained through violence, expulsion, rape, and various other forms of domination (Patni & Khan, 2024). Violence in literary works can be represented in two forms: physical violence and verbal violence (Ottoh-Agede & Igono, 2024). Literary works with a feminist perspective are an effective tool for conveying the diverse realities of women and expressing their thoughts and experiences (R et al., 2024). The oppression of women has been a theme in various forms of literature, including fairy tales. One well-known fairy tale is “Frau Holle,” a German tale

collected by the Brothers Grimm in their collection titled “Children's and Household Tales” (Kinder- und Hausmärchen). The fairy tale “Frau Holle” tells the story of two girls with opposite characters: one is diligent and kind-hearted, while the other is lazy and rude. Each receives a reward or punishment according to their behavior after meeting a supernatural figure named Frau Holle.

Previous studies have discussed feminism, particularly the oppression of women, such as the study by Abdou Bassin Boye and Shafaq Fayyaz in 2024. This study aims to analyze how perspectives, agency, metaphors, and transitivity in Juka Jabang's poems represent beliefs and socio-cultural practices that support the oppression of women in Gambian society. Another study is by Sujatha Moni and Miruna George in 2024. This study aims to explain how Dalit women experience multiple layers of oppression based on caste, gender, class, and religion. It also aims to show the courage and resistance of Dalit women in the face of injustice. In addition, relevant previous research includes a study by Wafa Yousef Alkhatib in 2024. This study aims to uncover the injustices faced by female characters in novels, such as Maha and Um Saad, who live under social rules and traditions that restrict their freedom.

The difference between this study and previous studies lies in the subject of the research. The subjects of previous studies were poetry, Dalit feminist literature, and novels. Meanwhile, the subject of this study is fairy tales. The problem statement in this study is how women are oppressed in the fairy tale Frau Holle ? The purpose of this study is to analyze how women are oppressed in the fairy tale Frau Holle.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this study is qualitative with content analysis technique. Qualitative research is a type of research that focuses on narrative and description of data. This research emphasizes descriptive explanations rather than the use of numbers (Ahmadi, 2019:3) . This study aims to understand the meaning, message, and representation of oppression of women in literary texts through a feminist literary criticism approach (Safarudin et al., 2023). With this approach, researchers can reveal how women are portrayed, the gender roles presented, and the forms of patriarchal domination implied in the story (Nugraha, 2020). This research is descriptive-analytical in nature, where data is collected through literature review and analyzed interpretatively based on feminist theory to uncover forms of oppression against women in the literary works.

The data source for this study is primary data from the fairy tale *Frau Holle*, which is a traditional German literary work that can be analyzed directly to understand its narrative structure, characters, and values (Ainun et al., 2022). This text provides an authentic picture

of folklore that has been passed down from generation to generation. Data collection techniques using note-taking, mainly through reading and analyzing fairy tale texts and literature studies, are methods often used in qualitative research, especially in literary and cultural studies (Rizky Fadilla & Ayu Wulandari, 2023). Reading and analyzing fairy tale texts is a data collection technique that involves reading fairy tale texts in a deep and systematic manner (Inarti, 2016). The aim is to gain a better understanding of the content, themes, characters, and values contained in the story.

The data analysis technique used in this study is content analysis. Content analysis is a data analysis technique used to understand the meaning contained in a text, whether it be in the form of writing, images, or other media (Sumarno, 2020). In a feminist approach, this analysis aims to reveal how gender representation, women's roles, and power relations between men and women are presented in literary works or other media. In qualitative descriptive analysis, researchers explore data without changing it, only describing and identifying patterns or themes that emerge (Fadli, 2021). This technique aims not only to describe existing phenomena but also to understand the underlying socio-cultural context. Data interpretation based on feminist literary criticism theory involves a sensitive reading of social structures and power (Nafia & Dewi, 2022). This theory emphasizes analyzing how texts depict gender inequality and reveal the voices of women who are often marginalized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Differentiation of Women Based on Gender Stereotypes

The fairy tale “Frau Holle” tells the story of two girls with contrasting personalities. The first girl is described as diligent, kind, and obedient, while the second girl is described as ugly and lazy.

“Eine Witwe hatte zwei Töchter, davon war die eine schön und fleißig, die andere hasslich und faul.”

(A widow had two daughters, one of whom was beautiful and hardworking, the other ugly and lazy)

This quote shows how women are often judged based on their appearance and their devotion to domestic work.

Inequality in Treatment

A form of injustice that occurs due to a mother's favoritism toward her biological child, even though that child behaves badly. Conversely, another child who is not her biological child is treated very unfairly and forced to do all the housework.

“Sie hatte aber die hässliche und faule, weil sie ihre richtige Tochter war, viel lieber, und die andere musste alle Arbeit machen und das Aschenputtel im Haus sein.”

(But she preferred the ugly and lazy one, because she was her real daughter, and the other one had to do all the work and be the Cinderella of the house)

In this excerpt, the diligent stepchild is treated like a domestic worker, while the lazy biological child is more loved. This shows the exploitation of female labor in the domestic sphere.

Coercion and Violence

Marxist feminist criticism of the fairy tale “Frau Holle” shows how women's work in the home is considered a duty rather than work that is valued economically or socially. The oppression of women in this fairy tale is demonstrated by the exploitation of women in domestic work. The women in this fairy tale are forced to work without any other choice, and this work is considered something that must be done in order to earn a place in society.

“Das arme Mädchen musste sich täglich auf die große Straße neben einen Brunnen setzen und musste so viel spinnen, dass ihm das Blut aus den Fingern spritzte.”

(The poor girl had to sit down every day on the main road next to a well and spin so much that blood spurted from her fingers)

“Nun trug es sich zu, dass die Spule einmal ganz blutig war, da bückte es sich damit in den Brunnen und wollte sie abwaschen. Sie sprang ihm aber aus der Hand und fiel hinab. Es weinte, lief zur Stiefmutter und erzählte ihr das Unglück. Sie schimpfte mit ihr aber so heftig und war so unbarmherzig, dass sie sprach: „Hast du die Spule hinunterfallen lassen, so hole sie auch wieder herauf.”

(Now it happened that the spindle was once covered in blood, so she bent down to wash it in the well. But it slipped out of her hand and fell down. She cried, ran to her stepmother, and told her what had happened. But her stepmother scolded her so severely and was so unmerciful that she said, “If you dropped the spool, you must fetch it back up again).

In both excerpts, the industrious girl is forced to work until her fingers bleed while turning a tool to find water. When she loses her water tool, her stepmother scolds her and forces her to retrieve it, without regard for her safety.

Rewards and Punishments

The golden reward for industrious girls shows the relationship between female labor and its economic value in that women are only recognized when they work hard according to social rules or standards. In contrast, girls who are lazy and refuse to work are punished. This

reflects how the patriarchal system pressures women to keep doing household chores without getting equal pay. In a capitalist society, household chores performed by women do not yield any benefits. In this fairy tale, housework is the responsibility of women without questioning why women have to rely on housework and have no other options. Punishment of lazy women is also found in this fairy tale. In this fairy tale, lazy girls are punished by being smeared with black asphalt, which can be interpreted as social ostracization of women who do not follow social rules or standards.

Quotes for awards for diligent children

"Das Tor öffnete sich, und wie das Mädchen gerade darunter stand, fiel ein gewaltiger Goldregen, und alles Gold blieb an ihm hängen, so dass es über und überdavon bedeckt war."

(The gate opened, and as the girl stood there, a huge shower of gold fell, and all the gold stuck to her, covering her completely.)

Quotes for punishment for lazy children

"Als sie aber darunter stand, wurde statt des Goldes ein großer Kessel voll Pech ausgeschüttet."

(But when she stood underneath it, instead of gold, a large cauldron full of pitch was poured out.)

"Das Pech aber blieb fest an ihr hängen und wollte, solange sie lebte, nicht abgehen."

(But bad luck stuck to her and would not leave her as long as she lived)

This quote shows that diligent and obedient women will be rewarded with gold, while lazy women will be punished by having asphalt stuck to their bodies for the rest of their lives. This reflects the belief that women must obey orders.

CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of the fairy tale "Frau Holle," there are elements of oppression against women, teaching that women must follow certain rules in order to be valued, while those who do not obey the rules will be punished. In this fairy tale, the diligent woman receives gold, while the lazy woman is punished by having asphalt poured over her entire body. This demonstrates how society forces women to follow certain rules, preventing them from freely determining their own lives. Additionally, it signifies the social stigma attached to women who do not meet societal expectations—those who do not adhere to the standards set by society are considered bad.

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