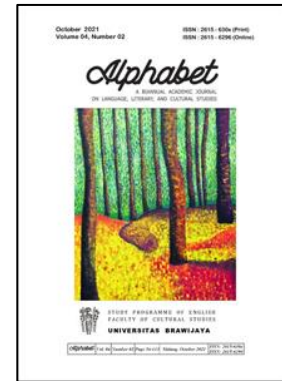


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The Probability of Two Female Characters to Become Radical Subject in Philippa Gregory's “The Other Boleyn Girl”

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The Probability of Two Female Characters to Become Radical Subject in Philippa Gregory's "The Other Boleyn Girl"

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Abstract

Individual actions tend to be motivated by a symbolic order in accordance with the society in where the subject lives. This makes certain individuals and their behavior never be liberated from the symbolic order applied in their society. In other words, these individuals can never be authentic because all actions must be under the control of applicable laws and regulations. This certainly controls the pattern of life since the individual's mindset is subject to the ideology that hegemonies them. In the Zizekian perspective, the subject is always in a lacking condition in their symbolic order, so that they continue to desire the Real. When their desire for the Real is fulfilled through concrete actions that go beyond symbolic laws, authentic subjectivity is formed. This study analyzed two main problems: (1) the actions of the main female characters (Anne and Mary) which are assumed to be radical acts, and (2) a comparison of the probability to become a radical subject in "The Other Boleyn Girl" novel by using the concept of a radical subject proposed by Zizek. The results show that Mary has a greater probability to be considered a radical subject because her actions have no motive.

Keywords: radical act, motive, subject, symbolic order, *The Other Boleyn Girl*

The narrative written prose in the literature is referred to as fiction. Fiction is a literary work that tells something that is fictional, imaginary, or something that does not exist and happens so that there is no need to find the truth of it in the real world (Nurdiantoro, 1991). The characters, events, and places mentioned in fiction are imaginary. As an imaginary work, fiction offers a variety of human problems, humanity, and life. Authors see these problems around them with full sincerity, then re-express them through fictional

works based on their views. According to Attenbern and Lewis in Nurdiantoro (1995), fiction can be interpreted as narrative prose that is imaginary, but usually makes sense and contains truths that dramatize the relationships between humans which is put forward by the author based on their experiences and observations of life. It is carried out in a selective and shaped view by following its objectives which at the same time include elements of entertainment and even warfare on the experience of human life.

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Besides, as a medium that can be used for social criticism, literary works contain certain ideologies, either representing or contradicting the ideology of the author and the ideology of society. Unconsciously, the authors are sometimes confined by all the regulations of the existing symbolic order, so this also affects the work they produce. To overcome this issue, many literary authors express their disagreement through the characters that they create in their works. They make the character take all actions against the symbolic order.

In Žižek's concept, the aspect that must be emphasized is the radical act of the subject which should be momentum, not a process that involves plans, intentions, goals, and so on. In this case, the momentum is the presence of an *ex-nihilo* explosion that is unexpected and without a goal but does not mean aiming without direction, and therefore Žižek (1989) saw this action as a direction (aim) without a specific goal. Thus, many authors may describe certain moments in their works as ideological fantasies that are not conveyed in the real world. As a consequence, it would be unexceptional when some authors might put some of the characters they targeted as forms of ideological fantasy.

It is common that sometimes the authors present more than one main character who is central in their literary work. Indeed, these characters have their own characteristics in the narration. This is also one of the characteristics of the writing style of a female author from England named Philippa Gregory. She often presents two or even more main characters in her works. The depiction of the characters is also considered quite complex because she usually makes the main characters in opposition to each other in terms of their character, intellectual, and cultural background. One example of her works is "The Other Boleyn Girl" novel (Gregory, 2001), in which there are two main female characters who have opposing characteristics. Anne is rebellious and feels superior, while Mary is a girl who always obeys the rules that are applied around her.

The setting of Gregory's "The Other Boleyn Girl" novel is sixteenth-century England, beginning in 1521, with the reunion of the Boleyn sisters at King Henry VIII's court and it ends in 1536 with the death penalty toward Anne Boleyn. This was a tumultuous time in British history. Henry VIII came to power at the beginning of the century in 1509. Four years later, Earl of Surrey, Thomas Howard (the powerful Howard-Boleyn family in the novel) defeated the Scots who tried to invade England. In 1517, Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation against the Catholic Church, which, in turn, influenced Henry VIII's bold move to claim that he—not the pope—who was the head of the church in England. In 1533, when Henry married Anne Boleyn, he was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. On another political front, Queen Katherine, Henry's first wife, lost support not only because she did not bear a son for Henry but also because her nephew, Charles, who became Emperor Charles V of Spain, turned against King Henry by not supporting British troops in Henry's efforts to take over France. Henry wanted to be king in England and France and was led to believe that Charles would help him in this step. However, as it turned out, Charles was interested in developing his own strengths. He occupied northern France and Italy instead and claimed to be emperor.

Other signs of trouble for the King were shown after Henry opposed the pope, divorced and exiled his Queen, and later married Anne Boleyn. The community, who loved Queen Katherine, denounced Henry's decision and began terrorizing Anne whenever she went into the public domain. The public described Anne Boleyn as a "whore" and threatened to injure her. That period was actually not very favorable for women compared with men (Cooper, 2001). For example, women are taught that they are inferior compared to men. In some cases, women are seen as tools of the devil. From an early age, women are taught to obey their parents without having any opportunity to question. This belief carries over to marriage, where women will do the same with

their husbands. Women very rarely receive an education. Jane Seymour, who married King Henry after Anne Boleyn, could hardly read, while Anne Boleyn was highly educated. In the case of marriage, it is uncommon for a woman of noble birth to choose her own husband. Marriage in the aristocracy was based on political or economic gain for the woman's family. Royal marriages were largely arranged for political and military power. Kings and queens often did not see each other physically until their wedding day. Due to the lower status of women, male heirs are the only guarantee of passing on the title and family wealth from one generation to the next. Therefore, Henry needed the son so badly to transfer his authority.

The narrative presented in this novel seems of intrigue with the seizure of the throne in it. The narration shows the struggle for power that occurred in the kingdom, so that many characters are against symbolic order. Besides, the issue of sexuality, especially sexual intercourse outside of marriage and even being the King's mistress was taboo and even prohibited in society. However, for the sake of maintaining the permanence of one's position in the kingdom, they, particularly the main characters, behaved beyond the limits of existing norms. Because of the polemic and all the upheavals that existed in British society at that time, these two characters were described as having a tendency to take radical acts. The level of radicalism is considered to be different or maybe one of them is actually just playing it safe. Thus, the researcher was interested in studying the comparison of the chances of the two main female characters in "The Other Boleyn Girl" to be radical subjects.

METHOD

This study used qualitative research that focused on description. The foundation of qualitative method thinking is the positivism paradigm of Max Weber, Immanuel Kant, and Wilhelm Dilthey (Moleong, 1989). Qualitative research is research that makes use of interpretive methods as a whole by presenting

them in the form of descriptions (Ratna, 2011).

According to Faruk (2020), material objects are objects that are the target of the study, so the material object in this study was the "The Other Boleyn Girl" novel by Philippa Gregory published in 2001. Meanwhile, the formal object as a point of view in this study used the radical subject by Slavoj Žižek. Žižek's concept focuses on criticism of the subject and ideology associated with the social conditions of society (Žižek & Milbank, 2009). However, in looking back at the radicalization process of the subject, Žižek also uses *cogito's* theory introduced by Descartes and Kant's idealism.

Lacan's concepts adopted by Žižek include the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the Graph of Desire. At the imaginary stage or what is also called the mirror stage, the subject (individual or ego) has not yet distinguished themselves from the other. Subjects are still individuals who are free from symbolic structures outside of themselves such as religion, culture, norms, and so on. At the symbolic stage, the self negotiates with language which is a signifying chain, so that their imaginary identification is subject to this symbolic order. Meanwhile, the Real is something that is unfamiliar and is outside the symbolic order of humans.

In Žižek's view, when a subject performs a radical act which is a form of certain activity that is aimed (called 'doing'), they are still confined in a symbolic order. Before arriving at this radical act, the subject will be in a moment of emptiness. However, when the subject has done an action that is not intended (called 'the act') spontaneously, the subject will achieve the real order.

When the subject has seen 'reality' and even criticized it, but is still doing it, the action is called cynicism. The subject will continue to carry out this cynical awareness and follow the Big Other. It is from this process that ideological fantasy works. Fantasy itself cannot be interpreted, but can only be crossed to be able to detect the vibrations of the drive, which Lacan always sees as a death drive. Meanwhile,

in contrast to the drive that pushes the subject into the void, fantasy provides a way for the subject to escape the void.

We have probably experienced the same thing. The general view would say that dreams are illusions (flying with a beautiful princess), and waking up is real (falling out of bed). Seeing this phenomenon, Žižek has another opinion. For him, the event of falling from the bed is the Real which disturbs the stability of the symbolic human system, when they are lost in their dream. The Real is painful, traumatic, and nobody wants it. However, people undoubtedly experience it, without any bargaining. Meanwhile, sweet dreams are a symbolic order that makes you feel comfortable and pleased. People do not want to be separated from it. However, life forces people to detach themselves from the oblivion of this symbolic system. People want to dream because they cannot stand reality.

This is what is typical of Žižek's style of analysis; it challenges and overturns the general system. Thus, it leads to the idea of radical politics. Besides, Žižek's argument about subjects can be carried out to discuss philosophies about humans, which discusses the concept of the Cartesian subject on the one hand, and the concept of the subject of postmodernism on the other. The former holds that the subject, a human being, is a rational, autonomous, atomistic, and free being in dealing with the world. Modernist and enlightened philosophers were in this scope. The latter sees that the subject is the result of external forces, such as economy, structure, politics, texts, the unconscious, and so on. The concept of man as a dialectical subject is formulated in this regard.

DISCUSSION

The Female Character and Their Acts

The main focus of Gregory's novel is on Boleyn's two sisters, Mary and Anne. The contrast between them is what changes the story. Both are described as beautiful and sensual, but Anne is often described as smarter

than Mary. However, this judgment is somewhat doubtful because those who claim that Anne is smarter are Anne herself and Uncle Howard. Anne is more aware of worldly affairs. She reads popular intellectual discourse for her own time and for her own sake, and therefore appears to be more intelligent. She's also more clever than Mary as she always plans for her own benefit. Once she's trained for a specific goal, she will do everything to achieve it.

Mary, on the other hand, has emotional intelligence. Even though she was first married by arrangement, she later learned to love her husband. When she is forced to sleep with the King, she finds reasons to love him too. When she became a mother, she learned deeper forms of love and began to question her obligations to her family's political motivations. She wants to be with her children so badly, to raise them on their own, rather than turn them over to the court. In the end, Mary falls in love with a commoner, a man who works for her uncle. William Stafford is a teacher whom Mary loves. William's love has no other motivation than to find and give happiness (Goldenberg, 2006).

There is another difference between these two sisters. Mary is kind of obedient, at least to a point. Anne, however, becomes hysterical in her demands as she rises to power. She fires her family as soon as she rises to the top even though her family members, particularly Mary and her brother George, have sacrificed their own necessities to ensure that Anne gets the crown of a queen. The struggle for power and identity has snatched the harmony between these two girls. Anne and Mary are initially just two girls of the nobility and are very polite, although Anne tends to be ambitious. However, this changes when they are forced to compete for the King's heart. All of their activities are controlled by aristocratic ordinances which have indoctrinated them from their childhood. This doctrine is that women must always submit to their father as the leader of the family, behave like an elegant and classy woman, and the most important thing is to maintain chastity before marriage and not

embarrass the family. This was also influenced by the church regime which became the ruling regime in the 1500s. The background presented in this novel reflects the moral and religious values that are highly respected in society. Anyone who violates this usually gets a sentence in the form of exile or even imprisoned in a royal prison.

It is narrated in the novel that Thomas Howard as the uncle and Thomas Boleyn as the father of the Boleyn sisters has a plan to make the King fall in love with Anne with the intention that Anne will give birth to a son from the King. This will raise the status of the Boleyn family and they can get abundant wealth from the kingdom. Unexpectedly, it is Mary who manages to make the King fall in love with. This makes Anne feel jealous and hurt. Not long after that, Mary manages to conceive a child from the King. Because Mary's pregnancy is the result of an illegitimate relationship, the royal party decides to lock Mary into her rest. In fact, the actions that Mary takes comes out of the prevailing symbolic order at which time adultery is strictly prohibited in society and even tarnishes her national reputation. However, Mary feels no guilt or sadness because, in fact, it is driven by her subconscious when she is in contact with the King so that she conceives innocent seeds.

"I don't know what happened to me, my body moved automatically to welcome the King's touch. I know this is a sin, but I do not have the slightest regret that will be imagined in the future.

I just followed my instincts as a human who needed this touch." (Gregory, 2001: 327)

This shows the spontaneity in the submission of Mary. She prefers to let everything happen without even thinking about the consequences of her actions. This also shows that she is free from the intervention that occurs in which it is known that the struggle before marriage is worth something terrible and must be punished. So, it is no surprise she is locked up afterward, but she does not mind that.

This incident also makes Mary's uncle and father worry, at least the less intensity of meeting between Mary with the King makes the King turn to other women. Anne, who is being exiled to France at that time, is brought back by her father and uncle. Anne's role is also needed to make the King not fall in love with other women. Unexpectedly, Anne's character changes. She is getting smarter, makes the King fall in love with her. However, Anne does not wish to give herself to the King before her status is legalized by marriage. Because the King has a great desire to have Anne, he finally justifies everything he can to make Anne his wife, one of which is by overthrowing the position of the queen at that time, Katherine. After failing to have a son for the first time with the King, Anne becomes pregnant with a second child, but she has a miscarriage and it depresses her. To keep her miscarriage a secret, Anne finally asked George, her younger brother, to have sex with her so that the miscarriage will not be discovered by the King.

It doesn't matter what happened. Anne even entered the valley of sin, not only by sleeping with other sinful men, she had sex with her own brother.

"You heard me, George, you have to help me get my baby back anyway." (Gregory, 2001: 356)

Anne did everything she could to achieve her goals. In this novel, Anne is actually a person who always opposes the system applicable at that time, which is patriarchy. The resistance that is carried out indirectly is Anne Boleyn's unconsciousness in fighting against the patriarchal system because the initial motive for doing this is jealousy towards her sister, Mary Boleyn, which leads to revenge Anne Boleyn who clearly states that Mary has taken King Henry from her and ruined her relationship with Percy. This is the reason for Anne to take revenge on Mary by giving hope to King Henry, who has been attracted to the King. Then, he begins controlling King Henry to send Mary and her son back to the village. Based on this motive, Anne becomes ambi-

tious to seize the position of the queen so that she fights her way unconsciously and she shows resistance to strengthen her position. This resistance is called indirect resistance because Anne does not do so based on a motive to fight back. However, what must be underlined is, in this case, Anne's resistance is her resistance only for herself, not against the women at that time.

Seeing that case, the most worthy act to be considered as the real radical act is what has been done by Mary. Even though she appears to be obedient to all existing rules, but guided by the feeling that dominates her, she is able to break through the symbolic order which at that time is the religious ideology that dominates the rules of society. This not only violates the existing ideology but also tarnishes the good name of the nobility that he and his family have. The intercourse that is carried out by Mary is not based on anything like what is done by Anne. Anne has an illicit relationship with the aim that she can still maintain her position as queen. Meanwhile, Anne does not have any motive other than surrender because of love.

A Comparison of the Probability of Two Female Main Characters to Become Radical in "The Other Boleyn Girl" Novel

Based on the previous explanation, there is a significant difference in how these two sisters try to navigate the ark of their lives. With a more qualified educational background that is obtained by Anne, she makes her act bolder in opposing the existing regulations and patterns of nobility. Everything that is done by Anne was so orderly and she knows what she wants in life. Meanwhile, Mary only obeys any orders without arguing. These two women are indeed inversely proportional, when Anne has a definite goal and she does all kinds of ways to get it, but Mary has no special purpose in her life other than living by following the flow. This is also because Mary is not more educated than Anne who receives education when exiles to Paris. When they are told to win over the King's heart, the one who has a

great ambition is Anne, for Mary does it because of her father's orders.

Based on the story of Mary's life, it does not seem that she plans what her life will be like. This is because Mary does not have any views on the subject she wants. The environment where she lives is a place with a patriarchal system that is still so strong. Therefore, Mary as a subject is more confined by her father's power than the symbolic demands that exist in society. Thus, when adultery occurs, this is done by her spontaneously and without guilt because she feels it is directed by love. In addition, she thinks more of her father's doctrine than the consequences it would have had. This actually shows the ideology of modernism in the midst of a very strong religious ideology.

In this essence, the role of Gregory as the author is something that is so substantial to include an ideology about modernism that even had not yet developed at that time (Marshall, 2006). These two ideologies certainly contradict each other because religious ideology is so deeply rooted and controls society. In the developing Christian teaching, everyone is positioned to be a subject who obeys all the rules that are taught, which means being a subject that is not real. So, by not allowing it when the story nears the end, Anne's awareness of it becomes stronger. However, what Mary does is that she keeps silent. She lets things happen as they should. Even when her sister is in law to die, she only pays attention to it while carrying her child. It can be considered as one way of becoming an authentic subject because, in truth, she allows adultery to happen without realizing it and she feels no guilt at all after the incident. This is like showing the ideological fantasy that the author wants to show, but in this case, Mary is not fully affected. If this is realized, the ideology of modernism will take over British society.

As the story nears its end, Anne feels that she has not been herself. Even though she admits that she is ambitious, she will not have the heart to sacrifice her family. However, what happens is she sacrifices her entire fami-

ly, making her younger brother killed for having sex with her. At that time, the forbidden relationship is discovered by George's wife and she reports it to the King, even though in the end the plan is not realized. Knowing about this, the King becomes angry. The end of this story is George and Anne's punishment by beheading their heads in public on charges of having an illicit relationship. At that time, Anne is so sorry for her actions, in which she said "I was so blind with the title of queen, I even sacrificed my brother for it" (Gregory, 2001: 400). Eventually, she becomes a mortal subject because basically everything she does is based on lust and has a motive so that she can become queen and rule. Moreover, the real motive for what Anne does is revenge she does because at the beginning Mary is the one the King loves.

On the other side, Mary tends to be a subject who does not behave in a lot of strange ways, but once she does something that violates the moral rules of both religions, it is the radicalism that she does. This is because, as explained in the section of acts shown by the characters, Mary is not pushed by any motive so that she has intercourse with the King. All that is in her brain at that time is sheer sexual desire.

CONCLUSION

All behavior of individuals can be considered to be controlled by the symbolic order that rules society. However, all these rules and symbolic arrangements have different characteristics from one another. In the social structure of society that existed in England in the 16th century, the most powerful ideology was that of the church regime. Everything must be based on morality and religious demands. However, in this novel, the author actually presents the figure of Mary who is initially graceful and obeying the rules, but then becomes a woman who tends to think that leads to modernism, which is clearly addressed by the symbolic order in her society. All actions taken by Mary can be considered radical acts. Even when she is a violator of morality and

religious rules, there is no motive behind the actions she takes. Thus, it can be concluded that the character who is most likely to become a radical and nearly authentic subject is Mary Boleyn. Since all of her actions are based on no motive, it is possible that the chances of being radicalized are perceived to be greater than Anne Boleyn.

This is different when compared to Anne. The desire of being the queen of the kingdom makes her a terrifying monster that even indiscriminately destroys anyone. Everything she does has a purpose, especially regarding the power and revenge she wants to take. Based on the description above, it can be concluded that ideological fantasies which are imaginary constructs can emerge, for example, in the criticism of transgender and transsexual people made by the author through her work. In "The Other Boleyn Girl" novel, Gregory criticizes the practice of patriarchy against which is deeply rooted in society. Because she lives in modern times, she assesses that this confines women from carrying out all of their life activities. Through these two women, she wants to show her radicalism as an author by breaking through the norms in England which strongly oppose sexual intercourse.

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