VALUE OF MARRIAGE REFLECTED IN OSCAR WILDE’S

AN IDEAL HUSBAND DRAMA (1895): A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

PUBLICATION ARTICLE

Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for Getting Bachelor Degree of Education

in English Department

by:

DIETA SUSANTI

A320110176

SCHOOL OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION

MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA

MAY, 2015
Surat Persetujuan Artikel Publikasi Ilmiah

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Nama : Dr. Phil. Dewi Candraningrum, M.Ed
NIP/NIK : 772
Nama : Titis Setyabudi SS, M. Hum
NIP/NIK : 948

Telah membaca dan mencermati naskah artikel publikasi ilmiah, yang merupakan ringkasan skripsi (tugas akhir) dari mahasiswa:

Nama : Dieta Susanti
NIM : A320110176
Program Studi : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Judul Skripsi : VALUE OF MARRIAGE REFLECTED IN OSCAR WILDE’S AN IDEAL HUSBAND DRAMA (1895): A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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Pembimbing I

Dr. Phil. Dewi Candraningrum, M.Ed
NIK: 772

Pembimbing II

Titis Setyabudi SS, M.Hum
NIK: 948
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by

Dieta Susanti, Dewi Candraingrum, Titis Setyabudi
Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta

dt.wihartono@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to show the value of marriage in *An Ideal Husband* drama by using feminist perspective. It is done by establishing two objectives: analyzing the drama based on its structural elements and analyzing the drama based on feminist analysis. This research is descriptive qualitative research. The object of the study is Oscar Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband* (1895) drama published in 2006 by Pennsylvania State University. The data sources are divided into two namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data source is script of *An Ideal Husband* (1895) drama and the secondary data sources are other materials taken from books, journal, and internet related to the study. Both data are collected through library research and analyzed by descriptive analysis. The study comes to the following conclusion. Based on feminist analysis, Oscar Wilde illustrates the lack of value of marriage in Victorian era which suffers the women. It is necessary to implement the value of marriage in marriage life and it is must be done by husband and wife equally in order to have long last marriage.

Keyword: Value of marriage, feminism, marriage, *An Ideal Husband*.

A. Introduction

The theme of *An Ideal Husband* drama is marriage. Men were born to be a social being that cannot live alone and need partner in their life. Marriage Man and woman who decide to make a commitment in a marriage bounding have a responsibility not only towards their selves but also their partner because they no longer two independent people but they become one who complete and dependent to each other. “Marriage is a bound of loyal vow between husband and wife in which there is a responsibility from the two” (Kertamuda, 2009: 13). According to Gottman (2001: 13) marriage has a good impact towards men’s
health; it can make them live longer. It can be said so because they have partner
to look after them.

Long last marriage and harmonic family are all the spouses dreams but it
is not easy to bring it into reality because men and women who decide to marry
come from different characteristic, background, point of view of something,
emotion level, and past experience which can arise the marital conflicts that lead
to unhealthy marriage. It will end in divorce if the conflict is still continuing.
That is why the wife and husband need value of marriage to avoid the marital
problems because its functions are as the binding of marriage and strengthener
when their marriage is weakening by the problems. According to Redd (in
Nancy, 2013) the unhealthy marriage has the low value of marriage. According
to Setiabudi (2013: 116) values of marriage which we believed are the bases of
the decision we made, values which are needed in happy marriage include
forgiveness, forbearance, loyalty, and love. Nancy (2013) adds that value of
marriage is thing that the spouses’ believed about what is good and worth, what
should be fighting for in marriage.

An Ideal Husband is one of famous comedy plays of Oscar Wilde. An
Ideal Husband was written in 1895 and was published by The Pennsylvania State
University in 2006. An Ideal Husband is an interesting play to be analyzed; there
are four reasons for it. The first reason, An Ideal Husband is a reflection of life
and its problems which usually happens in real life such as corruption to get more
wealth, threaten other for own sake, marital conflicts, etc. There are many moral
values that the readers can take to be practiced in real life.

The second reason is the character and characterization of An Ideal
Husband is very interesting because it has round characterization which consists
of various characteristics both good and bad that makes the story not
monotonous.

The third reason the writing style of Oscar Wilde in writing An Ideal
Husband is interesting. Wilde is known as a playwright who always puts epigram
in his works. He also uses repetition and figurative language in the dialogues to
make it more dramatic and interesting.
The last reason is the value of marriage which becomes the main issue is reflected well in this drama. People can know the condition of married women in marriage in Victorian era and the importance of value of marriage to have a happy marriage because women at that era was suffering because of patriarchy system which put them to be men’s subordinate include in marriage life. Wilde wants to open an insight of the readers especially women about the importance of marriage in marriage life and it must be done equally between the spouses in order to have the happy and long last marriage.

Oscar Wilde delivered his idea about marriage in Victorian era through *An Ideal Husband* drama. He criticizes the marriage at that time which still suffered the women because of the patriarchy system which pushed them to have self-sacrifice character and the lack of value of marriage. There is correlation between value of marriage and the drama. It is an interesting topic to be discussed. Therefore, the writer wants to study the drama by using feminist perspective.

B. Research Method

The type of this research is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative is a qualitative research in a descriptive data from the observed object. Bogdan and Taylor (in Moleong, 1983: 3) state that qualitative research is research in which the result in descriptive data from observed people and their behavior.

The object of the study is *An Ideal Husband* drama written by Oscar Wilde in 1895 and has been published by The Pennsylvania State University in 2006. It is analyzed by using feminist perspective.

There are two kinds of data which are needed to do this research namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data are the main data which consist of words, phrases, and sentences in the *An Ideal Husband* (1895) drama written by Oscar Wilde and it is published by The Pennsylvania State University in 2006. The secondary data are the supporting data taken from some references such as books, article, and internet which is containing information related to the research.
The technique of data collection in this research as follows: reading the drama repeatedly, taking notes of important in primary and secondary data, arranging the related data based on its classification, analyzing the data based on feminist perspective, and drawing the conclusion of the analysis.

The technique used in analyzing data is descriptive qualitative analysis. It focuses on the analysis of the structural elements of the drama and then feminist analysis.

C. Research Findings and Discussion

The researcher gets some research findings in analyzing An Ideal Husband drama. Each finding has some cases to be discussed. After the findings have examined, all of the components will get back together in a schematic manner in the discussion.

1. Findings

The researcher analyzes the value of marriage towards the women character in An Ideal Husband drama through feminist aspects such as the women’s position, women’s participation, women’s rights, women’s role, and the analysis of value of marriage.

a. Women’s Position

The women’s position as the second class in marriage is presented by Lady Basildon and Mrs. Marchmont whose husbands never appreciate them and makes them feel disappointed for their marriage. Their husbands are more interested in politics instead of their wife. The lack of appreciation between the spouses leads to the disappointment of marriage.

LADY BASILDON. Ah! That accounts for so much in men that I have never understood, and so much in women that their husbands never appreciate in them!

MRS. MARCHMONT. [With a sigh.] our husband never appreciate anything in us. We have to go to others for that! (AIH Act I Page 15).

But Lady Chiltern has the equal position in her marriage which is showed by the permission given by Sir Robert to her to take part in public area. They work together in Higher Education of Women. Supporting and
working together is essential in marriage to keep the bound between wife and husband.

LADY CHILTERN. Ah! It is heresy to say that in this house, Lady Markby. Robert is a great champion of the Higher Education of Women, and so, I am afraid, am I. (AIH Act II Page 47).

b. Women’s Rights

In Victorian era, marriage commonly was arranged by the parents. The freedom of choices is presented by Mabel Chiltern who makes her own choice of marriage by accepting Lord Goring’s proposal and becoming a real wife for him instead of making him an ideal husband like Lord Caversham or the society wanted.

LORD CAVERSHAM. And if you don’t make this young lady an ideal husband, I’ll cut you off with a shilling.
MABEL CHILTERN. An ideal husband! Oh, I don’t think I should like that. It sounds like something in the next world.
LORD CAVERSHAM. What do you want him to be then, dear?
MABEL CHILTERN. He can be what he chooses. All I want is to be … to be …oh! A real wife for him. (AIH Act IV Page 92).

Women still get unequal rights in making their own choice in marriage matter, in An Ideal Husband drama it can be seen from Lady Markby’s words when talking about Lady Brancaster’s daughter who chooses to marry a curate who has a lower social status than her. The society is gossiping about Lady Brancaster’s daughter because she failed to be what the society wants her to be by finding husband from the same class.

LADY MARKBY. No thanks, dear. [The servants go out.] the fact is, I have promised to go round for ten minutes to see poor Lady Brancaster, who is in very great trouble. Her daughter, quite a well-brought-up girl, too, has actually become engaged to be married to a curate in Shropshire. It is very sad, very sad indeed. I can’t understand this modern mania for curates. In my time we girls saw them, of course, running about
the place like rabbits. But we never took any notice of them, I need hardly say. But I am told nowadays country society is quite honeycombed with them. I think it most irreligious … (AIH Act II Page 49).

c. Women’s Participation

In *An Ideal Husband* drama, the major character, Lady Chiltern takes participation both in domestic and public area. In domestic area, it can be seen when she takes part in making decision for her husband who will get involved in Mrs. Cheveley’s corrupt investment. She does that to save and protect her husband. Protect the spouse is the value of marriage that must be implemented in marriage.

LADY CHILTERN. I was sure of it, Robert, I was sure of it. But why did you say those dreadful things, things so unlike your real self? Don’t let us ever talk about the subject again. You will write, won’t you, to Mrs. Cheveley, and tell her that you cannot support this scandalous scheme of hers? If you have given her any promise you must take it back that is all!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Must I write and tell her that?

LADY CHILTERN. Surely, Robert! What else is there to do? (AIH Act I Page 30).

Lady Chiltern also participates in public organizations. It can be seen when she chats with Lord Goring after coming back from Woman’s Liberal Association.

LADY CHILTERN. No; I have just come from the Woman’s Liberal Association, where, by the way, Robert, your name was received with loud applause, and now I have come in to have my tea. [To LORD GORING.] You will wait and have some tea, won’t you? (AIH Act II Page 38-39).

d. Women’s Role

In *An Ideal Husband* drama, the major character, Lady Chiltern describes the women’s role both in domestic area and public area. In
domestic area, she plays role as a wife which can be seen when she tries to save her husband from doing dishonorable thing by helping Mrs. Cheveley with her Canal scheme. A woman not only plays the role as the husband’s lover but also as friend, mother, and even protector in certain situation for him (Puspita, 1997: 202). From the dialogue below, Sir Robert takes her advice which can be called as appreciation towards wife.

LADY CHILTERN. … Robert, love gives one an instinct to things. I feel to-night that I have saved you from something that might have been a danger for you, from something that might have made men honour you less than they do. I don’t think you realize sufficiently, Robert, that you have brought into the political life of our time a noble atmosphere, a finer attitude towards life, a freer air of purer aims and higher ideals – I know it, and for that I love you, Robert. (AIH Act I Page 30).

In public area, Lady Chiltern gives contribution in supporting higher education for women together with her husband so that the women can have a better life. Supporting each other is essential in marriage life. She becomes the supporter of Higher Education of Women in which Lady Markby does not support in it. She argues that the higher education for women can destroy the marriage because the ideal Victorian wife was not supposed to be learnt many things like the men and the right role was taking care of the family and husband.

LADY MARKBY. Well, I must say it is most annoying to lose anything. I remember once at Bath, years ago, losing in the Pump Room an exceedingly handsome cameo bracelet that Sir John had given me. I don’t think he has ever given me anything since, I am sorry to say. He has sadly degenerated. Really, this horrid House of Commons quite ruins our husband for us. I think the Lower House by far the greatest blow to a happy married life that there has been since that terrible thing called the higher Education of Women was invented.

LADY CHILTERN. Ah! It is heresy to say that in this house, Lady Markby. Robert is a great champion of the Higher Education of Women, and so, I am afraid, am I. (AIH Act II Page 47).
e. Analysis of Value of Marriage

In Victorian era, getting married was all Victorian women’s dream because marriage was the way of survival for the women especially the lower class, because women at that time had limited freedom in participating in public area and making choices. Women were called ideal when they could fulfill the society expectation such as to marry, to bear the children, and to support their husband. The wife is expected to be passive and innocence which makes the women hardly got any freedom in the marriage life. The feminist seeks for the equality between men and women in any fields including marriage. To have the long last marriage, The husband and wife need values of marriage such as undying love, forgiveness, forbearance, loyalty, honesty, sacrifice, appreciation, and trust which prevent from marital conflict, the dissatisfaction, and disappointment in marriage which can end up the marriage in divorce and to make it works, it must be done equally by the two.

Appreciation is essential in marriage. The disappointment of the women towards their perfect husband is arisen because the husband never appreciates them; it is reflected in Lady Basildon and Mrs. Marchmont.

LADY BASILDON. Ah! That accounts for so much in men that I have never understood, and so much in women that their husbands never appreciate in them!

MRS. MARCHMONT. [With a sigh.] our husband never appreciate anything in us. We have to go to others for that! AIH Act I Page 15).

A happy marriage is built from undying love. It means that the spouses will love each other in good and bad situation. It can be seen from Lady Chiltern and Sir Robert who love each other in any condition. Sir Robert loves his wife very much that he cannot lose her love and so cannot Lady Chiltern. After the problem which reveals Sir Robert’s sin, Lady Chiltern still loves him although she feels disappointed before.
SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. [Taking her hand.] Gertrude, is it love you feel for me, or is it pity merely?

LADY CHILTERN. [Kisses him.] It is love, Robert. Love, and only love. For both of us a new life is beginning. (AIH Act IV Page 93).

The equality of value of marriage can be seen in the dialogue below. Honesty and forgiveness are also shown by both Lady Chiltern and Sir Robert. Lady Chiltern tells the truth about the woman whom Lord Goring expected that night, it was her. Knowing the truth, Sir Robert forgives her. It shows that Lady Chiltern has the equal rights and position as her husband.

LADY CHILTERN. Robert, it was not Mrs. Cheveley whom Lord Goring expected last night.
SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Not Mrs. Cheveley! Who was it then?
LORD. GORING. Lady Chiltern!
LADY CHILTERN. It was your own wife. Robert, yesterday afternoon Lord Goring told me that if ever I was in trouble, I could come to him for help, as he was our oldest and best friend … [SIR ROBER CHILTERN takes the letter out of his pocket.] Yes, that letter. I didn’t go to Lord Goring’s, after all…
SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What! Had I fallen so low in your eyes that you thought that even for a moment I could have doubted your goodness? Gertrude, Gertrude, you are to me the white image of all good things, and sin can never touch you. Arthur, you can go to Mabel, and you have my best wishes! Oh! Stop a moment. There is no name at the beginning of this letter. The brilliant Mrs. Cheveley does not seem to have noticed that. There should be a name.
LADY CHILTERN. Let me write yours. It is you I trust and need. You and none else. (AIH Act IV Page 91).

This drama reveals that self-sacrificing character between men and women has the equal portion. It can be seen after Sir Robert sacrifices his vacant seat in Cabinet to start a new life away from political life then Lady Chiltern sacrifices her dream and ambition in having an ideal husband by accepting Sir Robert’s past in order to save the marriage.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. And you would be happy living somewhere alone with me, abroad perhaps, or in the country away from London, away from public life? You would have no regrets?
LADY CHILTERN. Oh! none, Robert.
SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. [Sadly.] And your ambition for me? You used to be ambitious for me.
LADY CHILTERN. Oh, my ambition! I have none now, but that we two may love each other. It was your ambition that led you astray. Let us not talk about ambition. (AIH Act IV Page 85).

The importance of supporting in marriage becomes essential in making a happy marriage. Supporting the husband is also one of the women’s missions in marriage life to fulfill the Victorian society views about the ideal wife. In An Ideal Husband drama, it can be seen from Lady Chiltern who supports her husband career by telling not to retire from political life and to take the vacant seat in Cabinet.

[SIR ROBERT hands her the letter. She reads it, and then, with a gesture of passion, tears it up.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. What are you doing?
LADY CHILTERN. A man’s life is of more value than a woman’s, it has larger issue, wider scope, greater ambitions. Our lives revolve in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect than a man’s life progresses. I have just learnt this, and much else with it, from Lord Goring. And I will not spoil your life for you, nor see you spoil it as a sacrifice to me, a useless sacrifice. (AIH Act IV Page 89).

Supporting each other is important in making the harmonic marriage because it shows that they consider the spouse as the partner who must be treated equally as they do to their self not as the inferior. It shows in the dialogue below that it is not only Lady Chiltem who should support her husband but also she receives supporting from the husband in taking part in public area to improve her capability.

LADY CHILTERN. Ah! It is heresy to say that in this house, Lady Markby. Robert is a great champion of the Higher Education of Women, and so, I am afraid, am I. (AIH Act II Page 47).

2. Discussion

The analysis of the women character towards the value of marriage in Victorian era, women’s rights, women’s position, women’s role, and
women’s participation reveals the existence and the importance of the value of marriage in Victorian era marriage. In Victorian era, getting married was all Victorian women’s dream because marriage was one of the survival ways for the women especially the lower class because women at that time had limited freedom in taking part in public area, they were given the domestic area.

Victorian women were called ideal when they could fulfill the society expectation such as to marry, to bear the children, and to support their husband. Marriage at Victorian age led the arising of patriarchal system which put women to be dependant to their husband. Marriage in Victorian era was commonly a financial alliance and only secondarily (if even then) a union of two people in love (Tamminen-Kivistö, 2005). Marriage in Victorian upper class was not only marrying someone who they love but also as business matter in order to improve the family’s financial status in the society. The society still limits the women’s rights to choose her own choice in marriage; it can be seen from lady Markby words about Lady Brancaster’s daughter has engaged to be married to a curate who at that time was not the type of man to be married with and she is being gossiping by the society because of her choice in marriage.

The society in Victorian era puts the women as the inferior to the husband in their marriage life. Victorian view about marriage made them to have self-sacrificing character for the sake of the husband and child which puts them in the position of sacrificing side. It has mention before that to have long last marriage, the husband and wife need the value of marriage in the marriage life to avoid the marital conflict and it must be done by the two of them. The major character, Lady Chiltern reflects the woman who holds the value of marriage in her marriage life. She has self-sacrificing character by sacrificing her ambition and dream in having an ideal husband for the sake of her husband and marriage, but her husband also has the self-sacrificing character by sacrificing his career for Lady Chiltern. The value of marriage which is done only in women side is presented by the minor character Lady
Basildon and Mrs. Marchmont who sacrifice themselves staying with their husbands even if the husbands disappoint and never appreciate them; it makes them to be a passive side, it is also presented by Lady Markby who sacrifices herself, she is disappointed with her husband who always talks about politics with her although she is not interested in and must be patient listening to him; it makes her in the passive side who always follows the husband will. *An Ideal Husband* drama which reveals about marriage and the existence of value of marriage in Victorian era shows that marriage at that time still puts the women to be inferior to husband and to have self-sacrificing for the sake of husband and family, but the feminist attitude is showed by Lady Chiltern as the major character who gets the equals matter as the man does in her marriage because her husband and her implement the value of marriage in their marriage. Feminist attitude is also presented by the minor character, Mabel who breaks the perspective of Victorian marriage by rejecting the concept of ideal husband and preferring to be a real wife for her future husband.

D. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the previous chapter, the study comes to the following conclusions as follows:

First, *An Ideal Husband* drama wants to show the existence and the importance of value of marriage in Victorian marriage.

Second, the marriage in Victorian era which is reflected in *An Ideal Husband* drama harms the women if the value of marriage is only being done only in the women side.

Third, the message delivered by Oscar Wilde in *An Ideal Husband* drama is to open an insight especially for women about the importance of value of marriage in marriage life and it must be done equally between the spouses in order to have the happy and long last marriage.


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