Fantine In Les Miserables The Movie: An Analysis Of Superego And Madness

THESIS
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Abstract

The issue about women's oppression becomes interesting to analyze in the literary works since women are often underestimated by the society if their social status is too low. Moreover, this study aims to discuss about how does woman's social status influences her psyche. It will be seen from Fantine as an unmarried mother in Les Miserables the movie. The theory used in the study is feminist psychoanalysis which talks about woman madness and it is proceeded by the theory of personality from Sigmund Freud. The result of this study shows that women can be oppressed by the circumstance where the social status of women influences their existence in society. Therefore, this oppression is driving women into madness.

Keywords: unmarried mother, personality, feminism, madwomen, Les Miserables
Introduction

In this globalization era, movie can be one of the alternative choices to share or express people’s ideas such as showing the condition or life of people in the society. Les Miserable is one of the movies which describes how people struggle for survival. Part of it refers to the sorrowful life of the women characters, especially Fantine as an unmarried mother. Talking about women, we must focus on the most beautiful creation of God. Based on the last interview in the Research Method class with one of the Faculty of Language and Literature lecturers on last semester, she said that “women deserve to be happy.” I also think that women should get happiness in this life which means that they should be treated equal. Women are also special creation because they are created more special than men where they have womb and they can birth children. An old adage said that “heaven is in the bottom of mother’s foot” which means that women should be respected. However, there are times when women are required to have good attitude and maintain their dignity. If it is broken, it would be difficult for them to return back the positive perspective of the society. Hence, it becomes the reason why they always become the target of blaming. In addition, Humm (1992) said that “in the first moment, women are object, sometime victims of mistaken social knowledge” (p. 11). Therefore, it shows that women can be easily to get unfair treatment in social life.

In my point of view, it is important for women to have a social status in the society where women will get the recognition because it will influence the way the society’s thought of them. If the social status is too low or unimportant for the society, it would be meaningless. Just take an example from the widows, lesbians, and sex workers who always get a very low position in social life. They sometimes do not get a proper place and get unfair treatment in society because of their status. Some women will feel indifferent or do not care
about the situation, but the others will feel very depressed. Another example is about the women who already have child are often getting the disturbance and the rejection from the society, especially for those who do not have a husband. Just take an example from Fantine in Les Miserables the movie who also experiences the same. It is where she is rejected by the society because of her social status as an unmarried mother. This case makes women experience distress or oppression through themselves. I am wondering about what is wrong with it? Is it a very despicable thing to have child without husband? As Gilligan (1982) states that “women ‘show less justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility” (p.7). It means that women are more sensitive about their feeling and they are not ready with the new condition, thus it makes them tend to get oppression easily. For example when Fantine’s status as an unmarried mother is revealed, she is depressed and it drives her to take a wrong decision. However, viewed from the feminists’ perspective, this issue is certainly getting a rejection. There are so many feminists who fight for women right, thus women will get an appropriate place in this world. Moreover, it is true when women should maintain the attitude and behavior, but when they experience the difficulties in their life, they should get moral support. Sometimes it is difficult for women to choose their position. If they can choose, they will do it.

Furthermore, that issue has a relation with Fantine in Les Miserable movie because as the movie shows about how she gets unequal treatment in her social life because of her social status. She suffers because she is unmarried and she has daughter. Hence, the question of this study is how does Fantine’s social status as an unmarried mother influence her psyche? It is to find out how big the impact is of her status, thus it makes her living in misery. Moreover, the theory that will be used in analyzing this study is the feminist psychoanalysis theory where the theory maintains that the fundamental explanation for women’s way of acting is
rooted deep in women’s psyche, specifically, in women’s way of thinking about themselves as women. Thus, to conduct the study, I will describe and analyze Fantine’s psyche by using the theory of feminist psychoanalysis which talks about women madness. Then, it will be supported by the theory of personality from Sigmund Freud.

At the end of the study, what I expect is people can see about the women condition in society where they are often become the victim or object of inequality. In here, I also want people realize and start to think that all women have the same position is society even though the status is different. Women deserve the recognition from society whatever the condition is.

**Theoretical Framework**

Feminist psychoanalysis arises in early of the second wave of feminist because there is a rejection against Freud’s theory about gender inequality. He claims that women are inferior and also experience the penis envy. Because of his theory, there are many feminists getting angry and criticizing the theory. They argued that women’s social position and powerless relative to men had little to do with female biology and much to do with the social construction of femininity. But, as the focus of this study is on the women psyche, I will connect the theory about human personality with the feminist thought. Feminist psychoanalysis maintains that the fundamental expression for women’s way of acting is rooted deep in women’s psyche, specifically, in women’s way of thinking about themselves as women (*Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*). Thus, I think that everything that happen in women’s life or what they have experienced will influence their psyche. When women have to think about their life or desire, they will tend to be more use their feeling as women. That is why there are some women who always experience the inner
pressure or something that attack their psychological aspect. Some even suffered of the mental illness. This issue becomes one of the interests of feminist psychoanalysis. They raise the cases of women and madness as their study. Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert also raise this issue and write it in the book entitled *Madwoman in the Attic*. In the book, Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert bring an issue about the madwoman from a novel, *Jane Eyre*, written by Charlotte Bonte. Actually, in this book, Gubar and Gilbert try to draw an object-relation to investigate relationship between women writers. But here, I want to take an issue about the madwomen that they take in the novel. From the novel, both of them try to figure out the female character, named Bertha Mason who is hidden in the secret room by his husband. They assume that women often portrayed as the angel or monster generally. However, in here, the woman is categorized as someone who has a very limited life. She cannot explore her thought or mind and also her feeling. The portrayal of the female character in the novel show that the talented, powerful, and intensely women are seen as crazy.

On the other hand, according to Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert about the two images of women, and also their assumption about Bertha’s appearances—or, more accurately her manifestation—has been associated with experiences (or repression) of anger on Jane's part, I assumes that it is true that there will be a time for women where they will show the dark side of them. They do not always live or act as a pure angel, but they also can react as monster. In here, the monster is someone who has uncontrolled behavior, as it’s described in the novel. I agree with Gubar and Gilbert statement about the two images of women. It is because women actually have two personalities. Sometimes they will act as a loveable person, but sometimes they can also act very rude. Just for example, women will be very lovely when they are in a good mood. They can be very nice to everyone. But, when their mood is not stable, they can be very emotional and easily get angry. Even sometimes some can be very uncontrolled, like hurting themselves and others. However, I think that
there must be factors that cause the women act like monster. For example oppression, the situation around them, and many more.

Furthermore, according to the Freud’s theories about the human psychic, there is a strong relation between his theory and the issue which is raised by Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert about women condition. It is said that when the human’s psychic or mind is in unstable condition, they will act more unnatural than usual. This kind of condition is influenced by their unconscious mind, where one of the structures of human psyche is not balance; it is between the id or the superego. From my point of view, the issue in the *Madwoman In The Attic* about the madwoman (Bertha) makes me assume that the woman experiences a conflict through her psyche where the id is too strong. Just like it said in the book, *Women, Mad, and Law* that madness is “a phenomenon experiences by individual women at material discursive and intra-psychic levels; we cannot disentangle one from the other.” Thus, the woman becomes very rude and acts like a monster. Moreover, the conflict within the human psyche or mind will be very affect the way they act in their life. Especially for women that often have a very sensitive feeling, it will be difficult for them to control themselves.

Moreover, talking about psychoanalysis, the ideas about it are taken from Sigmund Freud’s thought about human personality. In addition, Freud (1856-1939) states that psychoanalysis is “a specific mind investigation technique and a therapy inspires from this investigation.” Thus, psychoanalysis is an investigation treatment for the mental or mind conflicts that use some techniques of subconscious. He also believes that most behavior are caused by thoughts, ideas, and wishes that are in a person’s brain but not easily accessible by the conscious part of mind. Moreover, in his study, Freud (1923) theorized the human psyche contains of three structures, such as id, ego, and superego. In his theory, Freud said that the id
is totally unconscious part of human, that we are unaware of its workings. The existence of the id is not rational. It is about the imagines, dreams, and invents things to get us what we want. The id operates according to the pleasure principle that aims toward pleasurable things and away from painful things. The aim of the id is to satisfy our biological urges and drives which includes feelings of hunger, thirst, sex, and other natural body desires aimed at deriving pleasure.

The second is about the ego. It is partly conscious and partly unconscious. It operates according to the reality principle; that is attempts to help the id get what it wants by judging the difference between real and imaginary. If a person hungry, the id might begin to imagine food and even dream about food. The ego will try to determine how to get some real food. Thus, the ego helps a person to satisfy needs through reality.

The last is about the superego. It is the same with the ego that partly conscious and partly unconscious. But in here, the superego includes the moral ideas that a person learns within family and also society. It gives people feelings of pride when they do something correct and feelings of guilt when they do something that they consider to be morally wrong. Moreover, the superego is like a child’s moral barometer, and it creates feeling of pride and guilt according to the beliefs that have been learned within family and the culture.

Those three structures of human personality cannot be separated each other. They have to be balanced. But according to Freud theory, the most important part is the balancing between id and superego. The struggle between them is an example of intra-psychic conflict (conflict within the mind). Freud believes that a healthy personality was one in which the id’s demands are met but also the superego is satisfied in making the person feel proud and not overwhelmed by guilt. However, the problems will come up if one of them is not balancing. If the id is too strong, a person will be rude, overbearing, selfish, and animalistic. Otherwise,
if the superego is too strong, a person will constantly worried, nervous, and full of guilt and anxiety and is always repressing the id’s desires. An overly strong superego, on the other hand, makes one a worrier, a neurotic, and so overwhelmed by guilt that it is difficult to get satisfaction.

Discussion

a. The Synopsis of Les Miserables (Fantine)

Les Miserables is one of the popular movies which published on 2012. This movie is adopted from the novel “Les Miserables” by Victor Hugo. Les Miserables tells about the poverty and suffer that happened in that era (1800s).

It starts by showing the situation experienced by the society and how they survive for themselves. One of them was a young woman, named Fantine, who was living as an unmarried mother. She had a child (Cossette) who was hidden in a small town with a cruel innkeeper man and his wife. Fantine kept her secret from the people, thus she would not lose her job. It was the only way to get money in order to fulfill her daughter’s needs. One day, the innkeeper man and his wife sent a letter and asked Fantine to send money to bring Cossette to the doctor. But in fact, they were lying. Unfortunately, one of the workers found the letter and everything changed. She was labeled as a prostitute and sacked from her job.

Fantine was left alone, felt so empty, unemployed, and destitute. Thinking about her daughter made her willing to do anything. She sold her necklace, hair, and teeth to people who wanted to buy it. She was also offered to join with the prostitutes and serviced the customers. Fantine tried to service the customers as her responsibility being a prostitute. She was so depressed and because of it, she raged by scratching one of the customers. Lucky her, she was saved by a Monsieur and he was willing to help her to get Cossette back. Because of
her suffering, Fantine hallucinates that she could see Cossette and felt like it was real, and then she died.

b. Fantine’s Social Status As An Unmarried Mother

Abandoned by his boyfriend when she is pregnant, Fantine has to spend her whole as an unmarried mother. In order to get money to support her child’s life, Fantine works as a labor in a factory. This situation shows that Fantine is actually come from a very low economical background. Her educational background is also not good enough because she cannot get better jobs. Besides that, the condition is also supported by the sorrowful condition of the state where the society lives in poverty.

Fantine’s has realized her social status since her pregnancy and it becomes her awareness, thus it makes her lives in silence to protect herself from the society’s judgment. She does not talk too much while she is working. Therefore, there is no problem during she works in the factory and nobody cares about her personal life, even though some of them are jealous because of her beauty. Her life changes until the workers (the labors in the factory) find the fact that she has a child without husband. It creates a thought in their mind that Fantine is not as pure as they think. The position that she gets is being equated with the prostitutes. Her status as the unmarried mother cannot be accepted by the society. It is shown in these quotations below:

The Slaves : “There is a kid that she’s hiding in some little town. There’s a man she has to pay. You can guess how she picks up the extra. You can bet she is earning her keep sleeping around.”

The Guardian : “I might have known the bitch could bite. I might have known the cat had claws. I might guess your little secret. Ah yes, the virtuous Fantine who keeps herself so pure and clean. You’d be the cause, I had no doubt of any trouble here about. You play a virgin in the light. But need no urging the night.”

Moreover, because of the situation, Fantine is sacked from her job. Fantine tries to explain the truth about her daughter, yet the people do not even listen to her. They are just
keep talking and claiming that Fantine is a prostitute. This condition shows the unfair treatment toward Fantine. As a woman, Fantine does not get her right or opportunity to tell about what actually happen to her. She should get support and respect because all the workers are also women.

Fantine’s life is going wrong since she is sacked. Thus, Fantine decides to work as a prostitute because the society cannot accept her status as the unmarried mother. Yet, if she does not take a decision, she won’t get money.

Moreover, another unfair treatment that also happens to Fantine is when Fantine is reported to the police by one of the customers, she cannot defend herself and nobody listen to her.

The Man: By Christ, you’ll pay for what you’ve done. I guarantee I’ll make you suffer.
Fantine : I beg you, don’t report me, sir. I’ll do whatever you may want.
The Man: Make your excuse to the police.
The Police : I have heard such protestations everyday for 20 years. Let’s have no more explanations. Save your breath, save your tears.

It can be seen that even she tries to apologize; she will always be ignored and never get defend herself. Furthermore, this condition shows that a woman will not be respected and will be underestimated when she does not have a standard of women social status in society. It is when women have a very low position in society and there is no recognition about their existence.

c. Fantine’s Personality

According to Freud (1923), human personality consists of three structures; those are id, ego, and superego where he theorized that a healthy personality requires a balance between id and superego. However, if one of them is not balance, there will be a psyche
problem. This case happens to Fantine. As an unmarried mother who lives separately with her daughter, Fantine has dreams to be with her and get better life. It can be seen from the quotations below:

“I had a dream my life would be so different from this hell I'm living. So different now, from what it seemed” (the song I Dreamed A Dream lyrics).

“now she lives with an innkeeper man and his wife. And I pay for the child” (it is when she tried to explain the real situation to the other slaves)

“There’s a child who sorely needs me. Please, monsieur, she’s but that high. Holy God, is there no mercy? If I go to jail she’ll die,” (it is when Fantine begged to the man who wanted to report her to the police)

By looking at this condition, the problem of her psyche is actually started from her dreams. In addition, Freud said that “the id is about the imagines, dreams, and invents things to get us what we want.” It is entirely unconscious part that we are unaware of its working. Dreaming of a better life and a good mother for Cossette, Fantine tries to find a way to make the dreams happen. However, the dreams unconsciously bring Fantine into problems. As it is described in the movie that Fantine works as a labor in a factory in order to get money for supporting her daughter's life. But it is not getting longer because she is sacked and equated with the prostitutes.

Thus, the condition makes Fantine feels guilty because her existence as an unmarried mother creates a tragedy in her life and also her daughter’s. It becomes one of Fantine’s failures to become a good mother. Being sacked from her job and labeled as prostitute create worry within herself. Freud also said in his theory that “the superego is like a child’s moral barometer, and it creates feeling of pride and guilt according to the beliefs that have been learned within the family and the culture.” Therefore, driven by the situation, the culture believes that women with a child without a husband cannot be accepted by the society because they will always have negative points toward them. The belief that is being reflected by the society toward this kind of woman condition make Fantine cannot survive. Thus, she
decides to find her own way. Besides that, a mother is also required not only to love her child, but she has to earn money to feed the child. In this case, Fantine as a mother cannot fulfill the requirement because she is too poor to reach it.

Being an unmarried mother, unemployed woman, and taking roles of being a mother and also father for Cossette reinforce the fact that Fantine cannot fulfill her daughter’s needs well. Yet, it cannot be accepted by her. It is shown when she is entering the world that should not be traced by her, named prostitution. All she knows is just about what she wants and it should be realized. As it can be seen from the quotations below:

The prostitutes: “I smell women. Lovely ladies waiting for a bite! Waiting for the customers who only come at night. Lovely ladies ready for a call. Standing up or lying down or any way at all. Bargain prices up against the wall!“I might have known there is always some man. Lovely lady come along and join us. “You’re no grander that the rest of us. Life has dropped you at the bottom of the heap. Join us sister. Make money in your sleep. That’s right, diaries. Show him what you’ve got.”

It implies how the prostitutes try to invite Fantine for entering their world and they are successfully persuade her. It happens because of Fantine is defeated by life and at the time she is in such of the condition where she is still living in her dreams. Apparently, her desire in realizing the dreams are growing up and what comes on her mind is just to make it happens.

Even though Fantine’s dreams will be enough to satisfy the id, but it won’t be enough to satisfy superego. It is because her dreams will get stronger and always keep coming. Therefore, when her dreams cannot be satisfied by the reality, her life becomes not as normal as before. It is because she thinks about something which is unreal as it stated in the following quotation:

“Cosette, it’s turned so cold. Cosette, it’s past your bedtime. You’ve played the day away and soon it will be night. Come to me, Cosette the light is fading. Don’t u see the evening star appearing? (smiling). Come to me and rest against my shoulder. How fast the minutes fly away and every minute colder.”
The quotation is actually reflecting Fantine’s desires at the time when she cannot reach all her dreams. She hallucinates that she meets and talks with her daughter until she died. As the movie shows that she is smiling while talking, means that the superego’s power is successfully brought her living in an illusion. Thus, the reality is certain broke the unconscious part (the id). The reality that Fantine is just a poor woman who does not have money to support her daughter’s life drives her into depression. It is because the id needs an instant satisfaction through the irrational means, whereas Fantine cannot produce it.

In addition, Freud adds that “if the superego is too strong, a person will constantly worried, nervous, and full of guilt and anxiety and is always repressing the id’s desires.” It seems to be what happened to Fantine. Driven by her dreams (the id) that cannot be reached, Fantine is more tend to feel pain. There is a conflict within her psyche where both of the id and superego are not balance. Even though the id has a big power, the superego always controls it. This is shown when Fantine really wants to actualize her dream, yet it is always be prevented by the situation where there is nothing to be proud of her. Especially when she is labeled as the prostitute and then she finally enters in it. It increasingly creates worries and deep regret within her. Feeling guilty because it of being not a lucky woman comes over her mind. Thus, related to the Freud concept, in this case the superego works as a cover of the id so that Fantine often experiences depression. It is emphasizing in a song which is sang by Fantine, as the lyrics below:

There was a time when men were kind, when their voices were soft...There was a time, then it all went wrong...I dreamed that love would never die...There was no ransom to be paid.....But the tigers come at night, with their voices soft as thunder. As they tear your hope apart, as they turn your dream to shame..........He took my childhood in his stride, but he was gone when autumn came.......I had a dream my life would be so different from this hell I'm living, so different now, from what it seemed. Now life has killed the dream I dreamed.

It implicitly reflects about hopes and dreams. Yet, by looking at the situation of Fantine, there are a regret and denial within her. Fantine seems like want to escape from the reality of being the unmarried mother. She is trapped in a condition where she is just living in dreams and
imaginations that she cannot reach. Furthermore, there is a specific memory that she recalled about her childhood and the man (her daughter’s biological father). Based on this, Fantine has experienced bad events since she was a kid. Even though she might ever felt happiness, but it is not getting longer, especially when she was abandoned by the man while pregnant. These things show her oppression comes from her surroundings such as cultural belief, love relationship, and also family.

Moreover, by looking at the condition of Fantine, it seems like both of the id and the superego want to be the winner and they have the same power actually. There is nothing wrong with her dreams or desire (the id), yet the superego controls the id more. It is shown when Fantine works as prostitute, thus it breaks the rule where a woman should maintain her pride. Especially Fantine has already rejected by the society because of her status as the unmarried mother. Then at the end, because of being controlled by the superego, Fantine personality turns into madness. Thus the peak of Fantine depression is created when the id cannot fulfill the superego standard because it is too strong to meet the id.

Furthermore, seen from the psychological aspects, Fantine has been experienced deep oppression because of her status as the unmarried mother cannot be accepted. Therefore, it causes her psyche is not in a stable condition where she always gets worry and feels guilty because of her desire is being controlled by the circumstances. It can be seen from her psyche where she lives in an illusion until she dies. This situation is supported by one of the branches of feminisms which talks about women madness. It is when Fantine releases her desire through the cruel action.

Furthermore, related to the movie, as a mother, Fantine has a different way in supporting her life and her daughter’s. She is willing to do anything in order to support her daughter’s needs. Based on this, Fantine can be described as a loving mother.
Fantine: ”How much for this? It’s my daughter’s.”
The Man: “Let’s make a price. I’ll give you all of 10 francs.”
Fantine: “It pays a debt. Ten francs may save my poor Cossette.
(She sold her necklace, after that she sold her tooth and hairs).
Fantine: “Tell Cossette I love her and I’ll see her when I wake” (then she died)

It shows that Fantine sacrifices herself by letting her necklace, tooth, and hair, even herself purchased. According to Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert in Madwomen In The Attic that women are often portrayed as the angel or monster generally (p.323).” Thus, this kind of condition shows that Fantine’s personality as a pure angel. In here, there is a pride in her that can be shown where as a woman, especially an unmarried mother, her struggle is more than enough, even indescribable.

On the other hand, although Fantine is described as an angel, she actually has different side that can be seen from the movie. It is when she becomes a monster. Fantine as monstrous can be seen when her social status as the unmarried mother is threatening her life. She does not have a figure of man who can protect and support her life and her daughter’s. Thus, living in a very poor condition forces Fantine to take a role as a father for her daughter where she has to work to survive. However, her decision to take the role is totally wrong. It is because she decides to work as the prostitute. Entering in the prostitution field and being a prostitute must create bad thing even it is come from the society’s perspective toward her or it is for herself. She made herself as the sexual object where she sells her body to men to get money. She breaks the rules of being an angel. As the Madwoman In The Attic portrays that angel should be someone pure, obedient, domestic, and submissive. It is also can be seen when she sells her teeth and she does not feel the pain of it. It shows that Fantine really loses her consciousness as human.

Furthermore, Fantine as monstrous also appears when Fantine tries to reject one of the customers, her personality changed immediately. It’s totally different with her previous
serving when she became a prostitute. At the first time, Fantine serves her customers without any complain because it is her responsibility that she has chosen. But, at the time, Fantine who is previously portray as lovely woman turns into someone who is very rude. As the movie showed that when the man tries to touch her, she is raging, roaring, hurling herself upon the man, and burying her nails in his face. Her rage seems like the peak of her depression. Susan Gubar and Sandara Gilbert add that “it is debilitating to be any woman in society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be a monster (Madwoman In The Attic, p.53).” They also argue that women rage was often show through the figure of mad woman.
Conclusion

This discussion reveals that Fantine’s social status as an unmarried mother in Les Miserable the movie is the root of her miserable life, especially it affects her psyche. The psyche problem occurs because of her status cannot be accepted in society. This finding is also supported by the theory of personality from Sigmund Freud which emphasizes the existence of her id is being controlled by the superego. It happens because Fantine’s dreams or the desire (the id) cannot be satisfied by the situation where the cultural belief and the society perspective (the superego) toward the unmarried mother will always be unworthy. Particularly her job as a prostitute greatly does not meet the standard of being accepted in society. Therefore, seen from the feminist perspective, this condition causes Fantine is categorized as madness. The change of her personality from angel into monster shows that her psyche is uncontrollable.

Looking back into Fantine’s condition, it certainly cannot be separated from the society judgment toward women. It shows that the existence of women and their status influence the way of the society think of them. Yet, by looking at Fantine suffering, the society should realize that women need to be recognized no matter what their social status.

Furthermore, for the future research, it would be helpful to discuss further about Fantine’s oppression, especially when she works as a prostitute. Not only Fantine, but also the other prostitutes who are willing to sell their body in order to get money for supporting life. It can be supported by the theory from Marxist Feminism which talks about how women become the private property for men.
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