

Neurotic Anxiety Female Characters in “The New Dress” by Virginia Woolf

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Abstract

This study discusses the neurotic anxiety experienced by Mabel Waring's character in the short story "The New Dress" by Virginia Woolf which was analyzed with a literary psychology approach. In this study, the formulation of the problem examines how Mabel Waring experienced neurotic anxiety and how the stream of consciousness storytelling technique affects Virginia Woolf's writing technique in the modern era. The data source is obtained from the short story "The New Dress" by Virginia Woolf. The research data are presented in the form of dialogues and monologues containing elements of neurotic anxiety as the main female character in the short story. The results of this qualitative descriptive study indicate that the neurotic anxiety experienced by Mabel Waring was caused by an affluent family background in the modern era. This caused Mabel Waring to feel insecure and afraid of being judged by the people around her. The modern era became a period where Sigmund Freud's theory gave influence to Virginia Woolf's work in the depiction of the main character in the short story "The New Dress".

Keywords

psychoanalysis; neurotic anxiety; modern era



I. Introduction

Literary work is a creative work with various genres. The genres of literary works consist of novels, novela, prose, drama, poetry to short stories (short stories). Short stories are short stories and have relevance to social situations in real life. Generally, short stories focus on a conflict experienced by the main character. Short stories can be completed in one reading, in contrast to novels which require more time, according to Poe, in Nurgiyantoro (2007: 10). Thus, short stories are the result of the author's imagination of what he feels, sees, and experiences.

Short stories cannot be separated from the characters. According to Aminudin (2009: 79), character is a character that is formed to experience events that are created within. Characters are divided into two categories, namely the main character and supporting character. Character is a picture of behavior in a person's daily habits concerning that it good or bad (Kusuma, 2021). Character is the nature who can tell the difference of someone from other people who are usually obtained from the family environment since childhood and aims to shape one's personality for the better (Purba, 2020). The value of character in relation to oneself is one of them is hard work (Elfindri in Septiadi, 2019). The main character is the most talked about character throughout the story, while the supporting character is an additional character that serves to support the main character who has a relationship in the story.

The problems experienced by characters in literary works can affect the psychological aspect. One of the problems that arise is anxiety. Anxiety is part of the feeling of insecurity experienced by humans. Anxiety can occur at unexpected times and humans have to deal with it. Anxiety can arise from oneself or other symptoms that make human emotions disturbed. Some of the factors that can trigger anxiety include guilt or worry about the future.

A person is categorized as having an anxiety disorder when the anxiety interferes with daily activities. According to Wiramiharja (2005, 66) individuals who experience anxiety disorders feel excessive fear that is irrational. The characteristics of anxiety can be the emergence of a sense of alertness to threats or dangers that do not necessarily occur.

The short story "The New Dress" by Virginia Woolf was written in 1924. However, this short story was published in 1927 after the novel entitled "Mrs. Dalloway" was released. Virginia Woolf became the most influential British writer in the world of literature in the modern era. The technique of telling the stream of consciousness is a new breakthrough that was carried out by Virginia Woolf in the modern era.

The development of English literature is divided into several eras. One of them is the modern era. Each era has the characteristics of the style of language and the topic of literary works raised. The modern era marked individualism, experimentation, absurdity, symbolism, and formalism. The creation of new things as a breakthrough is made by breaking the historical ways of seeing phenomena and writing. The thoughts of writers were also influenced by Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Charles Darwin. Irony, satire, and comparison are often used in modern literature to illustrate points related to society.

1.1 Formulation of the Problem

1. How is the modern era depicted in Virginia Woolf's short story "The New Dress"?
2. How does the neurotic anxiety experienced by the main female character in the short story "The New Dress" reflect the characteristics of modernity and Virginia Woolf's distinctive writing style?

1.2 Research Purposes

This study aims to identify the neurotic anxiety experienced by Mabel Waring as the main character in the short story "The New Dress". This study also identifies the characteristics of the modern era as reflected in short stories and Virginia Woolf's writing style.

II. Review of Literature

Anxiety, in the Complete Dictionary of Psychology, is defined as a mixed feeling of concern and fear about the future for no particular reason (Chaplin, 1989). Although this feeling is individual, the trigger can come from within or outside.

Sigmund Freud explained that anxiety is a manifestation based on the function of the ego to warn someone about a threat or danger. The existence of this threat makes a person prepare a synchronous adaptive reaction naturally. Freud said that anxiety plays an important role in personality dynamics. Freud (in Alwisol, 2009) mentions that there are 3 types of anxiety, including the following:

2.1 Realistic Anxiety

Realistic *anxiety* is known as fear. In everyday life fear arises because of the dangers of the outside world. This danger then makes a person feel threatened and anxious to be harmed. Realistic anxiety can arise when a person is near something that he thinks is dangerous.

The existence of realistic anxiety makes individuals create a behavior when faced with situations that they think are dangerous.

2.2 Neurotic Anxiety

Neurotic anxiety or *neurotic anxiety* is closely related to the negative escape caused by guilt or sin. Neurotic anxiety makes individuals fear that they will be punished or punished for their actions. The fear that arises due to neurotic anxiety is still imaginary, where the imagined sanctions have not yet occurred and cannot be ascertained. The fear that arises is not from past experiences like realistic anxiety. However, from worrying about future events as a result of the behavior that is done. In this case, neurotic anxiety imagines bad events as sanctions for actions that have been done. Neurotic anxiety is often claimed as a feeling of nervousness when someone is facing certain situations such as nervousness.

2.3 Moral Anxiety

Moral anxiety or *moral anxiety* is a fear when someone wants to do something that violates societal or moral norms. In this case, a person's superego is well developed. This anxiety arises because of the conflict between the id and the superego.

III. Discussion

3.1 Analysis of Modern Era

The Modern Era of English Literature began in 1890, after the death of Queen Victoria. The full effects of the Education Act of 1870, reinforced by the Act of 1902, began to be felt in the years before the war. Girls were allowed to attend education and Virginia Woolf was one of the people who had the opportunity to study at King's College London so that her mind was filled with bright ideas. In the modern era, writers have the freedom to experiment in their works. Virginia Woolf applies a *stream of consciousness* storytelling technique that makes her unique as a writer in the modern era. The modern era is also known as the era of revolutionary development. This is marked by the existence of the Bloomsbury group, where Virginia Woolf is also the leader of the exclusive group. The Bloomsbury Group is known as the breakthrough group in the modern era. Progress in various fields of science can be felt in the modern era. The modern era also marked the first time Sigmund Freud's writings were translated into English by Virginia Woolf's publisher The Hogarth Press.

Stream of consciousness storytelling technique, the short story "The New Dress" presents the monologue of the main character, Mabel Waring. While at the party, Mabel was busy with her own thoughts related to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. This can be seen from one of the following narrations "We are all like flies trying to crawl over the edge of the saucer, Mabel thought, and repeated the phrase as if she were crossing herself." (Woolf, 1927:1). Throughout the story in "The New Dress", Mabel talks more to herself than anyone else in the middle of an ongoing party.

In this era, literary works also became a bridge to describe the social conditions of British society. The modern era led British society to a rapid progress. The three basic needs of clothing, food, and housing are needs that can be met by people in various circles. Unfortunately, the various advances in this modern era did not necessarily prosper all British society at that time. The population is increasing rapidly, but it is not matched by the increase in food production. So, this causes social inequality. The same thing happened to Mabel, who had to share with 10 family members in one house.

“It was being one of a family of ten; never having money enough, always skimping and paring; and her mother carrying great cans, and the linoleum worn on the stair edges, and one sordid little domestic tragedy after another.” (Woolf, 1927:5)

The existence of this social inequality is what causes anxiety for the lower middle-class community. Advances in technology and the needs that must be met are certainly a burden for the lower middle class. In Mabel's case, she couldn't keep up with fashion trends according to her era. This can be seen from Mabel who chose the inspiration of the dress from the old edition of her mother's magazine.

“She had taken that old fashion book of the time of the Empire and had thought how much prettier, more dignified, and more womanly they were then, and so set herself – oh, it was foolish – trying to be like them, pluming herself in fact, upon being modest and old fashioned, and very charming, giving herself up, no doubt about it, to an orgy of self-love, which deserved to be chastised, and so rigged herself out like this. (Woolf, 1927:1)

3.2 Neurotic Anxiety Triggers

Mabel Waring, the main character, is depicted as a commoner who attends Mrs. Dalloway. She came in a yellow dress and clad in the Chinese robe she had worn for the past 20 years. While attending the party, Mabel felt insecure about her appearance. This anxiety was initially triggered when Mabel came to the party and she was presented with a mirror by Mrs. Barnett. *“Mabel had her first serious suspicion that something was wrong as she took her cloak off and Mrs Barnett, while handling her the mirror and touching the brushes and thus drawing her attention.” (Woolf, 1927:1)*. From the quote, Mrs. Barnett had no intention of bringing down Mabel's appearance, but she immediately felt that something was wrong with her appearance. This feeling of inferiority has been in Mabel since she was little *“the sense she had had, ever since she was a child, of being inferior to other people” (Woolf, 1927: 1)*. Coming from a lower middle-class family, Mabel feels that she is not worthy of the people around her. Mabel's anxiety is also triggered by a sense of dissatisfaction that arises from unfulfilled dreams. Mabel, of course, had dreamed of a beautiful future, married to a man of her dreams and was established. Unfortunately, Mabel actually married Hubert, an ordinary man with a modest job and living in a small house without a helper.

“For all her dreams of living in India, married to some hero like Sir Henry Lawrence, some empire builder (still the sight of a native in a turban filled her with romance), she had failed utterly. She had married Hubert, with his safe, permanent underling's job in the Law Courts, and they managed tolerably in a smallish house, without proper maids, and hash when she was alone or just bread and butter.” (Woolf, 1927:5)

The quote above explains how Mabel's life is much different than she ever dreamed it would be. Even though she can meet the daily needs of her husband's work, the life that Mabel lives is not a luxurious life. This situation then also makes Mabel feel weak and not a good mother for her children as stated in the following quote:

“Her wretched self again, no doubt! She had always been a fretful, weak, unsatisfactory mother, a wobbly wife, lolling about in a kind of twilight existence with nothing very clear or very bold, or more one thing than another, like all her brothers and sisters, except perhaps Herbert – they were all the same poor water-veined creatures who did nothing.” (Woolf, 1927:5)

3.3 Forms of Neurotic Anxiety

Mabel's neurotic anxiety makes it difficult to distinguish between reality and fantasy. This is in line with Virginia Woolf's *stream of consciousness storytelling technique*. Some forms of anxiety experienced by Mabel can be seen in the form of a monologue with herself and a narrative about Mabel's thoughts at a party. *"Now the fly's in the saucer," she said to herself, "right in the middle and can't get out, and the milk," she thought, rigidly staring at the picture, "is sticking its wings together."* (Woolf, 1927:3)

Another explanation for Mabel's neurotic anxiety is feeling bad about her appearance. The shadows of being judged by the party guests because her appearance in the yellow dress made Mabel feel inferior.

"She could not face the whole horror – the pale yellow, idiotically old-fashioned silk dress with its long skirt and its high sleeves and its waist and all the things that looked so charming in the fashion book, but not on her, not among all these ordinary people. She felt like a dressmaker's dummy standing there or young people to stick pins into." (Woolf, 1927:1)

The quote above describes how anxiety had an effect on Mabel. Even though what Mabel was worried about had not happened and it was all just a bad scenario in her head. As a result, Mabel needs validation from others to ensure that there is nothing wrong with her appearance or small compliments to flatter Mabel's appearance to look memorable at the event. However, when he received a compliment, Mabel took it as an insult. This incident was seen when Mabel deliberately raised her voice to get praise from Charles Burt.

"And one word of praise, one word of affection from Charles made all the difference to her at the moment. If he had only said, "Mabel, you're looking charming tonight!" it would have changed her life. But then she ought to have been truthful and direct. Charles said nothing of the kind, of course. He was malice itself. He always saw through one, especially if one were feeling particularly mean, paltry, or feeble-minded." (Woolf, 1927:3-4)

The same thing happened when Robert Haydon tried to calm Mabel who was worried about her appearance. Mabel thought Robert was just lying.

"I feel like some dowdy, decrepit, horribly dingy old fly," she said, making Robert Haydon stop just to hear her say that, just to reassure herself by furbishing up a poor weak-kneed phrase and so showing how detached she was, how witty, that she did not feel in the least out of anything. And, of course, Robert Haydon answered something quite polite, quite insincere, which she saw through instantly, and said to herself, directly he went (again from some book), "Lies, lies, lies!" For a party makes things either much more real or much less real, she thought; she saw in a flash to the bottom of Robert Haydon's heart; she saw through everything. She saw the truth." (Woolf, 1927:2)

The quote above shows that Mabel remains insecure when it comes to compliments from Robert Haydon. Instead of feeling better, Mabel thought Robert was lying. This then went awry for the people who had good intentions calming Mabel who was upset with her appearance. The best control lies in Mabel. The first thing you can do to deal with neurotic anxiety is to calm yourself down.

Some forms of neurotic anxiety that Mabel experiences are triggered by social conditions that are not prosperous, this dissatisfaction leads Mabel to feelings of inferiority and fear of being judged because she is not comparable to the other guests present at the party. This anxiety also makes Mabel unable to stop comparing herself to others.

3.4 Solutions to Overcome Neurotic Anxiety

Every anxiety must get a good treatment to overcome. The most important thing is to handle yourself when anxiety strikes. Anxiety can come at any time without realizing it. Mabel who finally reached the peak of anxiety and feeling embarrassed finally decided to leave the party. Before actually deciding to leave, Mabel imagined activities that would make her forget the anxiety she was facing. In this case, Mabel plans to go to the library, walk around London, and other activities that make Mabel no longer compare herself to the guests at the party.

“She would go to the London Library to-morrow. She would find some wonderful, helpful, astonishing book, quite by chance, a book by clergyman, by an American no one had ever heard of, or she would walk down the Strand and drop, accidentally, into a hall where a miner was telling about life in the pit, and suddenly she would become a new person. She would be absolutely transformed. She would wear a uniform, she would be called Sister Somebody; she would never give a thought to clothers again. And for ever after she would be perfectly clear about Charless Burt and Miss Milan, and this room and that room; and it would be always, day after day, as if she were lying in the sun or carving the mutton. It would be it! (Woolf, 1927:6)

After thinking about beautiful things, Mabel finally regained control. He decides to get away from the party, away from the crowds that trigger neurotic anxiety. The thought of tomorrow's plans pushed Mabel steadily away from the party.

“So, she got up from the blue sofa, and the yellow button in the looking glass got up too, and she waved her hand to Charles and Rose to show them she did not depend on the one scrap, and the yellow button moved out of the looking-glass, and all the spears were gathered into her breast as she walked towards Mrs. Daloway and said 'Good Night'.” (Woolf, 1927:6)

IV. Conclusion

The short story "The New Dress" is the story of a character named Mabel Waring. His life is classified as not prosperous in the modern era. One day, he was invited to come to Mrs. Dalloway. With references to old editions of magazines and their limitations, Mabel Waring came to the party. However, when she arrived at the same, Mabel's confidence collapsed, replaced by anxiety and worries that had not yet happened.

Mabel's neurotic anxiety can be seen from how Mabel curses herself in front of the mirror. He talks to himself a lot while looking at his reflection in the mirror.

The technique of telling the stream of consciousness is related to Freud's psychoanalysis because the stream of consciousness is centered on human thoughts at one time, one event. Virginia Woolf describes Mabel as a family that does not prosper in the modern era. This is an eye-opener that the progress of the times cannot prosper all social classes. In the case of "The New Dress" the upper class can certainly become richer, while

people from the lower middle class still have to try to keep up with the demands and lifestyles.

The neurotic anxiety experienced by Mabel Waring was triggered by a poor family background in the modern era. This then gives Mabel a sense of dissatisfaction with the life she leads. As a result, Mabel compares herself a lot with the people around her, which ultimately makes Mabel not have any value as a human.

Most of the anxiety comes from yourself. The ultimate control can be obtained by controlling oneself and taking the mind off the anxiety that has not yet occurred. In addition, getting out of situations that cause anxiety or worry too much is very important for dealing with anxiety.

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