

**AFFIRMING POSITION OF WOMEN IN PATRIARCHY SYSTEM IN
LYNN NOTTAGE'S PLAY SCRIPT *BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK*
(2013)**

THESIS

*Submitted as Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement to Obtain
the Strata One (S1) Degree in English Department*



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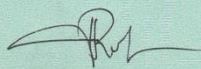
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ABSTRAK

Lestari, Indah. 2019. *Affirming Position of Women in Patriarchy System in Lynn Nottage's Play Script By The Way, Meet Vera Stark (2013)*. Thesis. Universitas Negeri Padang.

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Skripsi ini merupakan analisa drama *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* oleh Lynn Nottage. Isu yang diangkat adalah penegasan posisi inferior perempuan di dalam sistem patriarki. Tujuan penganalisaan ini adalah sejauh mana karakter, konflik (plot), *setting* dan *stage direction* memberikan kontribusi dalam mengungkapkan makna dari drama tersebut. Analisa ini dikaitkan dengan konsep *patriarchy system* oleh Kamla Bhasin dan konsep *beauty* oleh Naomi Wolf. Penggunaan konsep tersebut didasarkan kepada interpretasi teks and konteks dari drama. Hasil analisa ini menunjukkan bahwa sistem patriarki mengukuhkan posisi perempuan sebagai seorang yang inferior dan didominasi oleh laki-laki dibuktikan dari peran-peran yang mereka mainkan di dalam film.

Key Words: Penegasan, Sistem patriarki, dominasi, perempuan, inferior

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Patriarchy system has become the biggest obstacle for women around the world. In society where patriarchy is very strong, the women's lives will be severely restricted. There are significant gap between the men and women in society. This gap occurs because the men tend to take control in every aspects of women's life. The women are put in the lower position. The men can do their activities freely in public area, while the women stay in domestic area. Even in this period, where the men and women are stated to be equal, in fact the boundaries between them cannot be destroyed. Unlike the men, many women cannot get the higher position of job in workplace. The society even supports that the men are still better to lead a job than the women. For instance in film industry, according to Lyle, Matt, and Ilia in Polygraph (2015), most of directors, producers and writers are men involved in film making since years ago. These men can determine the role of women in film which affirm the women's position in real life as a secondary person.

In general, the role of the women in public area tends to show the real position of them in the real life. According to SPEARA, Specific English for Academic Research Assistant (2016), the term *affirm* means to state publicly that something is true. This refers to the act done by patriarchal to strengthen

the position of women as subordinate in society. The job that women get in public area tend to reflect the real women's role in domestic area. For instance even in film production, the women's role is related with the household work.

Many directors still put the woman as subordinate in some films. The women tend to play the role as accompanying men, be a wife or girl friend. Their role is also to do the service, nurse or take care of someone, do a cleaning, cooking and feeding. Though, the women who want to be an actress is selected by many aspects. The main point to select them is based on their physical appearance. The women's skill and talent will be counted after the main point is fulfilled. They have to follow the standard of beauty based on the patriarchy system.

The biggest film production is produced in Hollywood, Los Angeles, America. America is known as one of the modern and educated country around the world. Although, America seems to be neutral in assessing anybody, the issue of skin color discrimination still take place in this country. America still do the racism and they adhere to patriarchy system in treating the women. It can be seen through how they differentiate between white women and black women in film production. There is different treatment between them. The white women can play a role as a landlord, while the black women are a maid of the white women. However, both of them are still a woman which dominated by men.

The issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system is interesting to be explored. The cunning way that patriarchal do to construct the

women's position is shown in the role that they give to the women in a film and play. There are many literary works that reflect how patriarchal preserve the concept of women as subordinate in society. One of them is in play script *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* by Lynn Nottage. The play shows the readers how the patriarchy system takes control of the women even in film. The play exposes the actual situation of Hollywood film production that exploits the women and makes them standing behind the shadow of the men. Both of the character of the play cannot escape from their position as women who live in domestic area.

1.2 The Women in 20th Century in America (United States)

America has become one of the big and advance country, however the racism still become the serious problem in this country. American society categorizes the women based on their skin. Even though the women are dominated by the men, in this case the white women get a privilege rather than the black especially in job field. According to Thomas N. Maloney's writing based on Integrated Public Use Microdata Series Census samples for 1900 and 1990 in Economic History Association (2003), the number of the good job is taken by the white women, and the black women are put in the less important job. During this time, the job as a professional, technical, proprietor, manager, official, clerical, sales are handled by the white women. While the black women work as a laborer and service.

Although the black women have get their degree in this period as same as the white women, they still tend to get an unimportant work. Tamara Winfrey Harris in her book *The Sister Are Alright* (2005) says:

“It has always been accepted that black women can care for other people’s children. In slavery, many of them did the dirty work of homemaking—the cooking, cleaning, and mommying for masters and mistresses. Later, black domestics helped make it possible for middle-class white women to enter a workforce of which black women (and poor women of all races) were already an exploited part.” (p.58)

The text mentions that the black women still do a job as a maid or servant in the white’s house. Even in this time, the black women work with the same feeling of slavery. They do the household work, at least they are paid. However, the black women are trusted to take care of white’s baby. This situation is only profitable to the white women since they can go outside and enter the workfield. Meanwhile, the black women stay at home and do their misters or mistress housework and their own housework. It means the black women get the double job as a servant.

The two momen are getting the different variaties of job in public area. Settles, Isis, Jenifer, Pratt and NiCole in SAGE Journals (2008) say:

“Specifically, whereas Black women have been, and continue to be, relagated to the “dirtier” and least valued aspects of reproductive labor (e.g., cooking and cleaning), White women have traditionally held more skilled positions related to this work (e.g, supervisory, technical, and administrative support roles).” (p.13)

The quotation above proves that the white women and black women cannot get the same kind of job in public area. The white women can get the important job

while the black women still do the dirties job. It also can be said that the white women have the high salary rather than the black. This separation shows that there is still a racism in the workfield. The black women cannot improve their life and career into the better one. While the white women can get the good position in public area, though they are not the leader.

The black women are not really free from the racism. They are already good educated women, but it is difficult for them to get the professional position of job in public area. They are still determined by their color. They cannot truly get their freedom, even in this era. While, the white women can get a good career in public area, however, they cannot get the higher position as a boss or leader.

1.3 Affirming Position of Women in Patriarchy System

There are four keywords to form the terminology in this study. They are *affirming*, *position*, *women* and *patriarchy*. According to SPEARA, Specific English for Academic Research Assistant (2016), the term *affirm* means to state publicly that something is true. While in Merriam Webster (2019), position refers to the place where someone or something should be. Moreover, in Oxford Living Dictionaries (2019), woman means a female person associated with particular place, activity, or occupation. Furthermore, in encyclopedia (2008), patriarchy system is a social structural phenomenon in which males have their privileges of dominance over females, both visibly and subliminally.

In this analysis, affirming position of women in patriarchy system refers to the how patriarchy system strengthens the position of women as subordinate in society. In this play, affirming position of women in patriarchy system is shown in two points, career and its development as well as physical appearance.

1.4 A Brief Description of the Author's Biography

The biography of Lynn Nottage is taken and based on several sources; Encyclopedia, African-American History website, and An Interview with Lynn Nottage at the Interval. Lynn Nottage was born on November 2, 1964 in Brooklyn, New York, America. She is an African American woman playwright and associate professor of theater at Columbia University and a writer. She is a daughter of a school teacher's mother and a child psychologist's father. She married an independent film maker Tony Gerber and she has two children, Ruby Aiyo and Melkamu Gerber. She is graduated from both the High School of Music and Art and Saint Ann's School in Brooklyn. In 1986, she received a Bachelor's in Arts degree from Brown University. She obtained a Master in Fine Arts degree from the Yale University School of Drama in 1989. She worked as national press officer with Amnesty international for four years (Encyclopedia: 2005).

In 1990s, Lynn Nottage became a full time playwright after resigned from the Amnesty International. According to MacArthur Foundation Fellowship recipient (2014), Nottage is known as the most popular playwright in the United States. She has written many play scripts, some books, and produced two films. Her play scripts including *poof!* (1993), *Por'knockers* (1995), *Awalk Through*

Time (2000), *Intimate Apparel* (2003), *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of U* (2004), *Ruined* (2009), *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2013), *Sweat* (2015), and *Mlima's Tale* (2018). There are the books that written by Nottage *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* (1996), *Mud, River, Stone* (1997), *Las Meninas* (2002), *Snapshot: A Dramatic Anthology* (2003), and *One More River to Cross: A Verbatim* (2015). Her other works in film are *Side Streets* (1998), and *The Notorious Mr. Bout* (2014).

Lynn Nottage won some awards. Michelle Zhong (2018) states that Nottage is the first woman of any race to win the Pulitzer Prizes for Drama twice since the Pulitzer Prizes were established in 1917. She also received the other awards and recognition including New York Foundation for Arts Fellowships, New York Drama Critics, Circle Best Play Award, National Black Theatre Festival, August Wilson Playwright Award, Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, Obie Award for Playwright, MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award, Helen Hayes Award, Lee Reynolds Award, and the Merit and Literature Award from the Academy of Arts and Letters.

In Victoria Myers' report at The Interval, *An Interview with Lynn Nottage* (2015), Nottage says:

“I find it changes with every piece. I approach each play that I write as a new adventure. I love to travel and I like to go off the beaten path and I think I've used that same philosophy with writing. I don't want to write the play the same way, otherwise I'll get bored.”

From the interview with Lynn Nottage, it shows that she writes her play based on the issue or situation that happen in that time. She does not stick in one theme of

writing. She observes her circumstance and explores her ability to write something new.

1.5 *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark*

The play script *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2013) by Lynn Nottage reflects the issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system. *By The Way* here means to talk about something which is less important. The position of women is assessed as unimportant thing by patriarchy system. In this analysis, affirming position of women in patriarchy system refers to how the patriarchal who are represented by male producer, director and presenter in strengthening the position of women as subordinate and less important person in society. This issue can be seen through two characters, black and white female actresses in Hollywood. The first character is Vera Stark. She is an African-American woman who has a dream to be a professional actress. She migrates to Hollywood and works as a maid of white actress for years. She works hard to upgrade her skill in acting and tries to get an audition for a role. Moreover, she asks for a help to her mistress to recommend her, but it does not work. She even creates her own tragic story in order to get the role. Unfortunately, she tends to stick in her role as maid in film.

The second character is Gloria Mitchell, a white actress, who is the mistress of Vera Stark before she became an actress. She plays the role in film, but she only to accompany the men. She plays the role as a girl friend or wife since the beginning up to forty years old. These roles in film are representative of

the real women's position in society which is constructed by patriarchy system. Furthermore, every interview in television or radio tend to ask about the role of girl friend and maid that played by two characters. There are two points to show the position of women as subordinate in society done by patriarchy system through career and its development as well as physical appearance.

The first point to show the position of women as subordinate in society is career and its development. It can be seen through two characters. First character is Vera Stark (a black woman). She gets a limited role in film. She only plays the role as a maid or mammy. She is instructed by director to use a bad English pronunciation to show that she is a maid or mammy. In every interview she is led to talk about the same topic; her role as a maid. Second character is Gloria Mitchel (a white Woman). She can play a role as a mistress, however she is just as an accompany men, girl friend or wife. She even takes a role as a sexual object or a prostitute. She is directed by director to speak in good English to show her position as a girl friend or wife. Even in interview done by TV asks about her role as a wife. Both of the interviews never ask another role from the two characters.

The second point concerns with physical appearance. First, the black woman is accepted to become an actress because of her appearance and her shape of body. The black woman must wear the costume, maid uniform, that has been designed by patriarchy system in order to show her role as a slave or maid. She is able to join in film as a maid or mammy up to seventy years old. Second, the white woman also tend to wear the costume based on patriarchal's decision to

support her performance in film. Even the color of that costume is arranged by patriarchy system. She only plays the role as girl friend or wife until she is forty.

1.6 Problem of Study

This study focuses on the issue of affirming position of women in patriarchy system. There are two research questions that give contribution to reveal the issue. They are:

1. How far do the characters in play script *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2013) reflect the issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system?
2. To what extent do fictional devices such as, character, setting, plot (conflict) and stage direction contribute in revealing the issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system?

1.7 Purpose of Study

The aim of this study is to seek how far the characters reflect the issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system in play script *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark*. This study investigates to what extent the character, setting, and plot (conflict) in the play contributes in revealing the issue about affirming position of women in patriarchy system.

1.8 Previous Study

The analysis about affirming position of women in patriarchy system in Lynn Nottage's play *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2013) has not been found yet. However, there are two studies that related to this analysis and give contribution and interpretation in analysing this play.

First, the study is *Description of Subjugated Woman in Zora Naele Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Feminist Analysis* (2017) from Qasim Javed Ghauri, Muhammad Ehsan, Quratulain Shafique, Muhammad Zohaib Khalil, and Atta-ul-Mustafa. This analysis explains the issue about the domination of the men toward African American women in Florida. The women are mistreated by patriarchal financially, politically, socially and mentally. This analysis is done by analyzing the fictional devices character, and plot. The Lois Tyson's view about the female identity is used to analyze the novel. The concept of patriarchy system by Gerda Lerner is also used to analyze the novel. The result of this study shows that the main character, the woman, is a victim of the cruel patriarchy system in her society.

Second, the analysis is from Olusola Oso entitled *The Treatment of Patriarchy in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood and Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come* (2017). This analysis is about the African women who are oppressed, marginalized and tortured by men in family and society. This analysis is done based on the textual analysis; involves the fictional devices (character, plot and setting). The main character is Nigerian woman who struggle to survive in her own country dealing with the strong principle of patriarchy. This

analysis is done based on the concept of patriarchy system from Simone de Beauvoir. The result of this study reflects that the main characters, the women, have to survive in a family and society which are strong with patriarchy system.

Both of these studies give contribution and inspiration in analyzing the play *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* by Lynn Nottage. This study uses fictional devices; character, plot (conflict), setting and stage direction to reveal the meaning of the play. Unlike the previous studies, this analysis focuses on the way of the patriarchy system affirms the position of women as secondary person in society through the role that given to them in film. The patriarchal ways of affirming the women's inferior position are not giving them a chance to develop their career and valuing them through their physical appearance.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The analysis about affirming position of women in this play is related to the concept of patriarchy system by Kamla Bhasin and beauty by Naomi Wolf. Both authors give the big contribution in revealing the meaning of the play. Kamla in her book mentions about how the patriarchy system dominates the women in domestic and public area. The domination occurs since the system creates the gender. Meanwhile, Naomi focuses on the beauty of women in gaining a job.

The patriarchy system concept is from Kamla Bhasin. In her book, *Understanding Gender* (2003), patriarchy is the ideology or belief system and

social structure which men are superior. The patriarchy system attempts to maintain women's position as subordinate. Kamla Bhasin states:

“Men are considered to be the head of households, bread-winners, owners and managers of property and active in politics, religion, business and the professions. Women, on the other hand are expected and trained to bear and look after children, to nurse the infirm and old, do all household work, and so on. This determines their education or lack of it, preparation for employment, nature of employment, etc.” (p.7)

The quotation above shows that the men are not only the head in their family, but they also get the good position in workfield. The men tend to be hired as a leader and work in the top position with the higher salary. While, the women are put in domestic area to do all the household work. The women are only treated as secondary person. This kind of separation also impacts the men and women's education. The men are freely to get a higher education for having a good career in public area. Meanwhile, the women are not allowed to get the education so that they cannot achieve a good career. They stuck in the lower job.

Although the women can get their job in public area, they are not really free to choose the kind of job that they want. They are hired for a job that they often do at house. Kamla Bhasin in her book, *Understanding Gender* (2003), says:

“Women's work outside the home is often an extension of their work in the family. . . Jobs which entail authority, power and control are considered men's jobs and jobs involving caring, nurturing, servicing are seen as women's jobs. Women are subservient at home, they continue to be subservient outside. Men are in a position of power and control at home, they continue to be in similar positions in the outside world...” (p.36)

The statement above explains that the kind of job for men and women in public area are really different. The phrase *extension of their work in the family* in the quotation above means that the women cannot get a better job than the household matter. Thus, the job in public area seems just for extension of work they usually do in domestic area, such as servant of family at home become a nurse, nanny, and teacher for kindergarten in public area. These kind of jobs do not give a good impact to the women. The women cannot improve their life to escape from doing the house work. Kamla points out that the men can achieve the higher position while the women in a lower position. In addition, she says that the women's work is the longer hours than the men, and their work often undervalued and underpaid.

The women not only get a job in public area based on their role in domestic area, but they are also hired because of their physical appearance. It is explained by Naomi Wolf in her book entitled *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (2002), states:

“The most emblematic working women in the West could be visible if they were “beautiful,” even if they were bad at their work; they could be good at their work and “beautiful” and therefore visible, but get no credit for merit; or they could be good and “unbeautiful” and therefore invisible, so their merit did them no good. In the last resort, they could be as good and as beautiful as you please—for too long; upon which, aging, they disappeared. This situation now extends throughout the workforce.” (p.35)

The text shows that the value of women in getting a job tends to be based on their physical appearance. The first point people give to the women in getting a job is based on their appearance rather than their skill and knowledge. In another word,

people tend to value the women from their physical appearance. They cannot get the top position in career though they are beautiful, smart and have ability in job. Ironically, the physical appearance cannot stand longer because of the age. Therefore, it is difficult for the women to get the opportunity at the same level as the men.

Besides, the men take the huge advantages of the women since in patriarchy system the women are their own. The men exploit them. According to Gerda Lerner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), the men treat the women as an object. They are owned as a whole. The women may lose their right as a human being. They even cannot make a choice, determine what they want. They are entirely controlled by the men including their body, soul and chance.

In this analysis, the concept of patriarchy system refers to the way of the men in film company in order to strengthen the inferior position of women in society. The patriarchy system in this play is very strong. The two characters are the victim of patriarchy system. Both of them play the role as a second person. The white woman only plays the role as a wife in film until she is forty because they cannot keep their appearance anymore. While the black woman tends to get the role as a maid until she is seventy because as a maid, it does not require a good physical appearance. They are related to the Kamla and Naomi's concept.

This analysis is supported by text and context based interpretation in order to bring out the issue of affirming position of women in patriarchy system. According to Guerin (2005) defines text based interpretation is based on the analysis and interpretation of the text itself. It is focused on the analyzing the

fictional devices (this case is dramatic element); character, plot (conflict), setting, and stage direction. The dramatic elements give the big contribution in revealing the issue of affirming position of women in the play. Meanwhile, context based interpretation means that the analysis of the play is not only focused on the text itself, but also involved the real phenomenon that occurs in the real world.

Character gives the big contribution to reveal the meaning of the play script. According to Abrams (2005:42), characters are the persons who have a moral, intellectual and emotional qualities that can be seen from what they say and their way of saying it, and from what they do. In literary work, the characters help the readers to understand and reveal the meaning of the work by looking at character's behaviour, action, thought, and conversation. The characters of this play are black woman, Vera Stark, and white woman, Gloria Mitchell. Both of the characters are put in the role as a secondary person; the black woman as maid or servant and the white woman as accompanying men. In fact they are selected as the actress based on their physical appearance.

Another fictional device used to analyze the play is plot (conflict). Plot is a sequence of events for the things that happen in the story with a conflict. According to Bakesh (2008:54), conflict can be identified into four kinds; men versus self, men versus men, men versus nature, and men versus society. There is two categories of conflict; internal and external. The internal conflict that the characters face in this play is they must follow the standard of the director and producer when they play in film, even it is not what they want. While the external

conflict that occurs in this play is the two characters deal with the patriarchy system which directs them to the lower position as subordinate.

Setting is another fictional devices of the play. Setting also gives the contribution in analyzing the play. The setting is not only about the time and place but it is also about the situation. According to Abrams (2005:330), setting is the general place, historical time and social circumstances that occur in the work. In this analysis, the setting refers to the situation and condition such as the racism and the system of patriarchy that still occurs in Hollywood, Los Angeles, America. The Hollywood film industry is dominated by the patriarchy system represented by male producer and director. It seems the film bring the women into a superstar, famous and public figure. In fact, the position of the women are still as a second person and subordinate. The women are not entirely free from the men's domination in a film.

Furthermore, the stage direction is an instruction written into the script of a play, indicating stage actions, movements of performers, or production requirements. The stage direction in this play gives the big contribution in order to show the situation, condition and feeling that the two characters have. It helps in revealing the meaning of the issue.

1.10 Methodology

The analysis of play script *By The Way, Meet Vera Strak* (2013) by Lynn Nottage is analyzed through text and context based interpretation. The play is also analyzed by using fictional devices on drama such as characters, plot (conflict),

setting and stage direction. These devices are related to each other. Characters are used to reveal the issue about affirming position of women which done by patriarchy system. Through plot, it can be seen the conflict that occurs in the play, internal and external. Setting has the function to show the atmosphere, situation and condition faced by characters in the play. Furthermore, stage direction is used to show the action, movement and reaction of the characters to what happen in the play. It gives the contribution in process of analysis in revealing the meaning. In addition, this analysis deals with the concept from Kamla Bhasin about patriarchy system (2003) and Naomi Wolf about beauty (2002).