

Women's Struggle against Patriarchy in *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff

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Abstract

This study is entitled "How I Live Now" by Meg Rosoff, Women's Struggles in Patriarchy." This study discusses women's struggles and how the protagonists overcome them in Meg Rosoff's novel How I Live Now (2004). Daisy is a teenager from the city who falls in love with her cousin on a farm. However, Daisy has to split up and fight to meet her cousin because of the third world war. After a long struggle, Daisy was finally able to visit her cousin at her home in London. Therefore, this study uses the descriptive method. Qualitative methods are used to describe, analyze, and interpret narrative elements to build an understanding of women's struggles and how women manage them. In further research, the data were analyzed using the theory of Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Judith Butler (1993) as the basic concepts and framework. This study reveals some of the problems of women's struggles in dealing with issues that gradually change in line with the events in the novel. The problem that raises the patriarchal issue experienced by women in their social life, such as at work and during activities in society, leads to the disclosure of the efforts made by the main character to be able to change the patriarchal treatment received.

Keywords: *Social system, Women's struggle, Simone de Beauvoir, Gradual change.*

A. Introduction

The women's struggle depicted in literary works serves as a means for authors to communicate and advocate for gender equality, particularly empowering women to assert their rights as human beings. This struggle is often contextualized within the broader framework of combating patriarchal norms and practices, wherein women are systematically relegated to subordinate positions. As Sultana (2010) defines, patriarchy entails the dominance of men across both public and private spheres, perpetuating hierarchical structures that oppress and exploit women.

Throughout history, women have grappled with multifaceted social issues such as violence, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, economic disparity, and societal marginalization. These challenges underscore the pervasive narrative of women as vulnerable entities in need of protection. Consequently, literary representations frequently center on female characters navigating these adversities, reflecting the realities of their time.

Literature, as a reflection of societal dynamics, intertwines with the fabric of human experience. Literary works serve not only as artistic expressions but also as vehicles for exploring and critiquing social phenomena. According to Bressler (1994), literature is inherently imaginative and creative, offering insights into the human condition and societal structures. However, as observed by Beauvoir (1949), traditional literary canons often perpetuate male-centric narratives, relegating women to the sidelines and objectifying their experiences.

The examination of women's struggles within literature necessitates an exploration of fundamental issues such as gender and sexuality. Gender, as Hughes (2002) elucidates, encompasses both socially constructed meanings and biological attributes, shaping individuals' roles and identities within society. From a feminist perspective, the pursuit of gender equality entails granting women equal opportunities, including access to education and socioeconomic parity, as articulated by Rosenstand (2006) and Nyoman (2014).

This study focuses on analyzing Meg Rosoff's novel *How I Live Now* (2004) to illuminate the challenges women face in resisting patriarchal structures. Rosoff's narrative subtly underscores women's complicity in perpetuating patriarchal norms, wherein women's positions are subordinated. By examining patriarchal practices within the novel, this study aims to underscore the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

Previous scholarly endeavors, such as those conducted by Rahayu (2018), Putra (2016), and Fauzia (2019), have delved into similar thematic concerns, providing valuable insights into women's struggles in literature. Drawing on Rahayu's analysis of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), this study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the complexities of female protagonists' experiences within patriarchal frameworks.

Intrinsic elements such as character, setting, plot, point of view, and theme serve as foundational components in literary analysis. Novels, as Abrams (2015) describes, offer expansive narratives that delve into human experiences, often portraying characters grappling with pivotal events that reshape their lives. Understanding these narrative elements enriches the interpretation of literary works and facilitates deeper engagement with thematic concerns.

Existential feminism, as articulated by Beauvoir (1949), underscores women's quest for liberation and self-realization within societal constraints. Despite women's efforts to assert their autonomy, societal limitations hinder their existential fulfillment. Beauvoir's theories challenge prevailing gender stereotypes and advocate for women's agency in defining their identities and destinies.

This study employs Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949) as a theoretical framework to analyze women's struggles against patriarchal structures. Additionally, Judith Butler's notions of gender performativity, as expounded in *Gender Trouble* (1990), inform the study's examination of societal constructions of femininity and masculinity. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to elucidate the complexities of women's experiences within patriarchal contexts.

Through a synthesis of literary analysis and feminist theory, this study seeks to illuminate the enduring significance of women's struggles in literature and society. By interrogating patriarchal norms and amplifying marginalized voices, it contributes to ongoing dialogues surrounding gender equality and social justice.

B. Method

The study employs qualitative methods to gather data, focusing on analyzing the characters, environments, and thematic elements of the novel *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff. Following Arikunto (2002) and Creswell (2016), qualitative research is descriptive, emphasizing textual or visual data over numerical values, to explore societal issues and meanings attributed by individuals or groups. This approach aligns with Moleong's (2005) description of qualitative research, aiming to holistically understand phenomena such as behavior, perceptions, and motivations through language-based descriptions. By utilizing a descriptive qualitative method, the study seeks to generate in-depth insights into the themes of women's struggles against patriarchal structures depicted in the novel. This approach enables a nuanced analysis, capturing the complexity and richness of the text beyond mere numerical correlations.

C. Findings and Discussion

Meg Rosoff's novel *How I Live Now* (2004) vividly portrays the challenges faced by women, examined through Simone de Beauvoir's feminist lens. Women's struggles are delineated into internal issues within the narrative, categorized by their settings: work and society.

1. Women's Struggle at Work

In the novel, the portrayal of women's struggles in the workplace underscores the pervasive gender dynamics that relegate women to subordinate positions. Daisy's experiences during the wartime setting highlight her challenges in navigating a predominantly male environment. Daisy's encounter with Joe exemplifies the objectification and trivialization of women's contributions, where she faces distractions and discomfort due to male coworkers' behavior. Beauvoir's assertion that women acknowledge the masculine-dominated universe resonates as Daisy perceives her work environment as predominantly male-controlled, echoing the societal power structures outlined in Beauvoir's theory.

2. Women's Struggle in Society

Social dynamics further compound women's struggles, as depicted through Daisy's familial relationships. Daisy's discomfort with her father's new girlfriend underscores the complexities of family dynamics and societal expectations. The introduction of a new partner disrupts the familial equilibrium, exacerbating Daisy's sense of alienation and displacement. Beauvoir's observations regarding women's subordinate status within familial structures align with Daisy's experiences, where societal norms perpetuate gendered roles and power imbalances within family units.

3. The Protagonist's Efforts in Breaking Patriarchy

Daisy's response to these challenges reflects her agency in resisting patriarchal norms and asserting her independence. As she assumes leadership responsibilities within her group, Daisy transcends traditional gender roles, becoming a guardian and protector for her younger cousin, Piper. Through her actions, Daisy challenges traditional gender norms, embodying Beauvoir's notion of women seeking liberation through self-realization. Daisy's efforts to build familial bonds amidst chaos symbolize her quest for autonomy and sovereignty in a patriarchal world. Beauvoir's assertion that women can attain freedom through independence resonates as Daisy strives to break free from dependence on male authority figures, carving her path towards empowerment and self-determination.

In *How I Live Now*, Meg Rosoff adeptly portrays women's struggles against patriarchal structures through Daisy's experiences. By employing Beauvoir's feminist theory, the novel offers insights into the complexities of gender dynamics and societal expectations. Daisy's journey towards independence and self-realization serves as a powerful narrative of resilience and agency in the face of adversity, highlighting the enduring relevance of women's struggles in contemporary society. Through Daisy's story, Rosoff underscores the importance of challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for gender equality, echoing Beauvoir's call for women to assert their autonomy and freedom.

D. Conclusion

Through a comprehensive analysis of Meg Rosoff's novel *How I Live Now* (2004), it becomes evident that the narrative intricately explores various facets of women's struggles against patriarchal structures. Daisy, the protagonist, serves as a lens through which these challenges are vividly depicted, encompassing stereotypes, social dynamics, wartime pressures, and subordination. Daisy's journey unfolds against the backdrop of societal expectations and gendered norms, reflected in the stereotypes she encounters at home, work, and in society. Despite facing adversity, Daisy demonstrates resilience and agency in confronting these stereotypes and asserting her right to autonomy and self-determination. Moreover, Daisy's struggles

extend beyond societal perceptions, encompassing the harsh realities of wartime conditions and the pressures exerted by male dominance. Her resilience in navigating these challenges underscores the indomitable spirit of women in adversity. Through Daisy's narrative, Rosoff underscores the importance of challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for gender equality. Daisy's evolution from a victim of circumstance to an independent woman reflects the transformative power of resilience and agency in the face of oppression. In conclusion, *How I Live Now* offers a poignant portrayal of women's struggles and resilience in the face of patriarchal structures. Daisy's journey serves as a testament to the enduring spirit of women in overcoming societal constraints and asserting their rightful place in the world. As readers, we are reminded of the importance of advocating for gender equality and empowering women to break free from the shackles of patriarchy.

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