The Politics of Literature

Literature is political, Judith Fetterley argues in ‘Introduction to The Politics of Literature’ (Fetterly, 1978: XIII) She further claims that like in the politics of anything else which power is the main issue, so is in literature. The core of power in literary politics is consciousness:

Consciousness is power. To create a new understanding of our literature is to make possible a new effect of that literature on us. And to make possible a new effect is in turn to provide the conditions for changing the culture that the literature reflects. To expose and question that complex of ideas and mythologies about women and men which exist in our society and are confirmed in our literature is to make the system of power embodied in the literature open not only to discussion even to change. Such questioning and exposure can, of course, be carried on only by a consciousness radically different from the one that informs that literature. Such a closed system cannot be opened up from within but only from without. It must be entered into from a point of view which questions its values and assumptions and which has its investment in making available to consciousness precisely that which the literature wishes to keep hidden. Feminist criticism provides that point and embodies that consciousness. (Fetterly, 1978)

It is also such new consciousness of feminist readings that meticulously offer new ways of reading and interpreting literary writings.

Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore posit that there is no such thing as neutral approach to literature. All readings/interpretations are political.

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This paper aims to scrutinize the works of Ratna Indraswatio Ibrahim, one of Indonesian female writers who gives a strong concern on the politics of women’s identity in fiction. Her works are truly reflections of how literary fictions can house as representations of female identities. From the perspective of feminist readings, in her narratives women function as objects inherited from a society that says women matter less than men: a society that thinks women barely belong to the culture that marginalizes and silences them through domesticity. Ratna raises critical issues about the subjugation and domination of women, and captures the imbalance in social relations. Yet Ratna’s women are not all submissive: those denied their rights respond to the injustice they experience. Through her narratives Ratna acknowledges the struggles of women, especially those in under-privileged conditions.

Key words: politics, representation, women and identity

The Politics of Literature

Politics and Social Representations in Literatures: A Feminist Reading of Ratna Indraswari Ibrahim’s Works

Diah Ariani Arimbi

Abstract

This paper aims to scrutinize the works of Ratna Indraswario Ibrahim, one of Indonesian female writers who gives a strong concern on the politics of women’s identity in fiction. Her works are truly reflections of how literary fictions can house as representations of female identities. From the perspective of feminist readings, in her narratives women function as objects inherited from a society that says women matter less than men: a society that thinks women barely belong to the culture that marginalizes and silences them through domesticity. Ratna raises critical issues about the subjugation and domination of women, and captures the imbalance in social relations. Yet Ratna’s women are not all submissive: those denied their rights respond to the injustice they experience. Through her narratives Ratna acknowledges the struggles of women, especially those in under-privileged conditions.

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