

# Cynicism toward Pregnancy in Short Story “Pregnant” by Anna Gavalda

Lia Indri Hapsari

*Ilmu Susastra, Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia*

*lia.hapsari@live.com*

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**Abstract:** Pregnancy is one experience which can be experienced exclusively by women only. Even though in some cases pregnant is a miracle and grace for women, but some other women believe it is a curse for them. Anna Gavalda is a France author which chooses pregnant as main topic in her short story, Pregnant. This study discusses how the narrator in the short story expresses its cynicism toward pregnancy. Radical-libertarian feminism is the theory chosen to analyze this short story. The analysis in this study uses feminist lens and approach. This study finds that the omniscient narrator in the short story does not believe pregnancy as a miracle for women. It believes that pregnancy only bring sorrow to women and confine women’s activity.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is one of women's natures that cannot be replaced by men. In many cases, pregnancy is a miracle and an invaluable gift. This process is also very eagerly awaited by many women. In 2009, the pregnancy rate in the United States reached 6.369 (Pregnancy Rates for U.S. Women Continue to Drop, 2013). Pregnancy which is a natural nature of women is not fully acceptable to every woman. This statement can be proven by high abortion rate in the United States, which is 1,152 in 2009 (Pregnancy Rates for U.S. Women Continue to Drop, 2013). Abortion is one way to abort the fetus in women’s womb forcibly. Rejection toward pregnancy is not can be seen through abortion act, but also illustrated in the literature works. One of them is a short story by Anna Gavalda entitled *II G* or translated into English as *Pregnant* by Karen L. Marker. Anna Gavalda is a successful French writer. *II G* is a short story collected in a short stories collection entitled *Je voudrais que quelqu'un m'attende quelque* published in 1999 (Gavalda, 2014).

*Pregnant* is chosen to be the corpus in this study because rejection toward pregnancy can be found in the story. The cynicism and rejection of pregnancy is displayed by the omniscient narrator’s narration in the short story. This narration is the focus in this study. This research uses qualitative research method by means of descriptive analysis. Feminists

are the approach chosen to analyses *Pregnant* short story. Specifically, it refers to a feminist radical-libertarian which is a second wave of feminist movement. Radical-libertarian feminists, Shulamith Firestone, argue that natural reproduction imposed on women is a subtle oppression to women (Firestone, 1970). As long as natural reproduction still exists, women will not get the same status as men in society because natural reproduction will waste women’s time and energy. Women will have no time and energy to contribute in society (Tong, 1998). The use of a feminist approach in *Pregnant* encourages the researcher to highlight and interpret women represented in literary works. With all the limitations, the previous studies about *Pregnant* have not been able to be found. However, by 2015 Beauty Dewi Sofranita examines Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* by using the radical-libertarian feminism approach. She found that Helen's character brought a radical-libertarian feminist spirit through his actions and thoughts. It is different from the norm in her surrounding community. She believes that abortion is a good idea for women to be freed from patriarchy norm.

## 2 METHODS

This study analyse Anna Gavalda’s short story called “*Pregnant*”. Anna Gavalda is a France author

which chooses pregnant as main topic in her short story. This study focused on discussing how the narrator in the short story expresses its cynicism toward pregnancy. Radical-libertarian feminism is the theory chosen to analyse this short story. The analysis in this study uses feminist point of view and approach.

### 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The short story, *Pregnant*, by Anna Gavalda uses a third point of view through the omniscient or implicit narrator. In this short story, all characters are not labelled by name. The main character in the story is "She" who suffered a miscarriage in the sixth month of her pregnancy. The attempt to generalize women's opinions is seen through the narration is used in the story. The omniscient narrator has expressed the rejection toward pregnancy that revealed by radical-libertarian feminist. This can be seen from the omniscient figure of the narrator who does not use the "I" pronoun when expressing his opinion about pregnancy experienced by She, "*they're nuts, these women who want a baby. Nuts*" (15). This quotation could be evident that the narrator does not experience pregnancy. The quotation also can be very meaningful. The narrator who disallows pregnancy tries to classify women who allow pregnancy to be fool, nuts, crazy, and unbelievable women.

Women are grouped into two broad categories. The first group is a group of women who accept pregnancy and willing to have a baby. The second group is a group of women who do not want to get pregnant. Based on the above quotation, it supports the presumption toward narrator as the radical-libertarian feminist who does not have the desire to be conceived. The narrator is the opposite of the She character in the story who can be categorized to women who approve pregnancy. The opening sentence cited can affirm the hypothesis of this analysis that rejection of pregnancy is the idea of this short story and the narrator as the bearer of the radical-libertarian feminist's idea in *Pregnant*.

#### 3.1 Unstable Emotion during Pregnancy

Rejection of pregnancy is conveyed to the reader through cynicism of the narrator. Narrator of the story has an important role in the delivery of the rejection message. This statement can be proven through how the author only give voice to the

narrator and silence any different opinion from women and men character in the story. The narrator has the full right to reveal its opinion as someone who rejects pregnant experience. Narrator's cynicism of pregnancy which experienced by She is seen from the beginning to the end of the story, "*they're nuts, these women who want a baby. Nuts*" (15). This scorn sentence is repeated by the narrator by grouping She into a group which consist of women who accept to be pregnant, "*She is like the rest of them*" (15). This statement shows that the narrator does not agree with the principle of women who have a desire to become pregnant and have baby. Narrator's cynicism toward She's pregnancy leads the allegation that the narrator brings radical-libertarian feminist's idea which believe pregnancy is an oppression for women. As Tong explained, radical-libertarian feminist believes that natural reproduction, in this case women as fetus carrier, is an oppression act (Tong, 1998).

The idea of pregnancy as oppression is presented to the reader through narrator voice. The narrator as the only voice in the story tries to make it clear the reason why pregnancy can be oppression toward women. The narrator opinion about She is woman who was less consistent with her decision since the beginning of the pregnancy phase, "*She says to herself: I'll wait two more days and I'll do the test. Of course, she does not wait*" (15). Women who want to be pregnant are reflected as women who are less powerful in restraining their emotions, and this affects decisions that are considered inconsistent by the narrator. According to Tong (1998), radical-libertarian feminists believe that a happy pregnancy for many women is a great trick of the patriarchal system in society. In *Pregnant*, the narrator who brought the radical-libertarian feminist idea agrees with that. This opinion is supported by the emotional acts of women affected by pregnancy presented in the story.

In the story, She is illustrated as women who very curious about her pregnancy test result. She tries to deny this curiosity but failed. The curiosity She feels is an impact of the excitement of her pregnancy. Even though She feels curious, She kept putting off her curiosity to do a pregnancy test for the sake of the flutter feeling She experienced. The narrator denounces She is less rational, delaying for the unnecessary thing, "*She waits. She prolongs the exquisite agony. The test is there, in her bag on the table in the entryway, and as for her, she's a bit restless. She remains the master of the situation*" (16). The narrator's cynicism tone expressed in this quotation. The narrator believes her actions to delay

her pregnancy test even though she was so curious and wanted to make sure of her hunch is a nonsense act. A test done several hours after delay does not change the test results. But the nervous feeling that brought pleasure seemed to be favoured by She. The narrator use "*She remains the master of situation*" to make the reader see what the narrator sees about the nonsense act when a woman gets pregnant.

In "Pregnant", the restless and curious feelings that She enjoys are repeated during fifth month of her pregnancy. She who can immediately know about the sex of fetus by asking the doctor feels confused whether she should ask the doctor or not. In spite of the fact that the problem she is facing is so simple, she still put the deep thinking, "*Should they, yes or no, ask whether it's a girl or a boy? ... at work, she has a lot of worrisome problems to solve and decisions to make every other minute. She makes them ... but this ... she does not know*" (23). This easy decision was portrayed as more confusing to her mind than the problem of her work. In the story, the narrator tries to bring the comparison and proof how her confusion about her pregnancy is an obstacle for her productive day. The narrator compared the problems of work that she manages with this problem. After deciding not to ask his obstetrician, she did not feel relieve, "*She wants to grab him by the shirt and shake him so that he'll tell, but no. it's a surprise*" (24). Pregnancy is illustrated as the obstacle for woman. The narrator describes how pregnancy is capable of disrupting a woman's mind through this condition.

Not only show how pregnancy can take over women emotion controller, the omniscient narrator attempts to show the reader that pregnancy only takes a woman's time and energy, "*she'll never think about anything else ... not one minute goes by in those nine months that she's not thinking about her baby*" (18). The narrator shows that a nine-month pregnancy experienced by women will only confiscate women's minds. The narrator tries to show the reader women cannot concentrate in doing other work while She is busy with her pregnancy and her baby. Women's minds which is taken over by the pregnancy and the baby will make women unproductive person. This lack of productivity certainly causes women's opportunities to be underestimated in the eyes of patriarchal system. This possibility is strongly opposed by radical-libertarian feminist.

Pregnancy that take over She's mind also affect her productive activity. The narrator sees that the pregnant woman will spend more time doing unimportant things like looking at a picture of a

fetus that has not even been fully formed, "*... she'll spend a few times looking at these photos and while she's learning them by heart, you won't hear the sound of her breathing*" (21-22). She's excitement that grow from this looking unformed fetus activity is ridiculed by the narrator. Her love for her pregnancy seemed to cause She feel amazing and did not remember that she needed to breathe. For She, this activity is so amazing and breathe taking. But in narrator's point of view, this is a ridiculous action. The narrator looks so cynical about She's actions that are so emotional to her pregnancy.

### 3.2 Physical Problem Faced by Pregnant Women

Narrator's cynicism to She's pregnancy does not just stop at emotional issues. The narrator also concerning physical problems that changes during the pregnancy, "*weeks have passed and her belly's gotten bigger. Her breast too. Now, she wears a 36C. Unthinkable*" (22). Pregnancy certainly not only affects the mental development of the prospective mother. Physical change is also a natural thing happening to pregnant women. The narrator shows how this is so absent will be enjoyed by women. Physical changes certainly disturb and cause inconvenience for women. One of the discomforts experienced by women who are pregnant is the discomfort when summer comes, "*In the summertime, a huge belly, it keeps you warm*" (24). This is not a good thing. In the summer, the pregnant woman's body temperature is described to remain warm and effect to women's convenience. The warm temperature will cause swelter effect to pregnant women. This discomfort is not stop during the day. At the sleeping time, women with a growing belly cannot find a comfortable sleeping position, "*Not to mention the nights. You sleep so badly; no position is comfortable. But fine*" (24). The cynicism of the narrator implied with the diction, but fine. The narrator tone is trying to mocking how women push their body to accept the inconvenience they feel. The change She experienced also effect to her pee frequency. It is more than usual and She cannot escape from this experience during pregnancy. "*She really has to pee. As usual*" (22), this quotation shows the reader how pregnant women will not escape from this experience.

Many physical changes that occur to a woman's body during pregnancy is not free from side effect. The changes impact on women's daily activities. Women find it difficult to do the things that they usually do. It is because She is disturbed by their

physical changes. *"She offers to take care of the bouquets. It's the perfect job for a cetacean like her"* (24). Pregnant women cannot do much work especially physical work of their own, *"They'll put her right in the middle of things, the boys will bring her what she needs and she'll make it all as beautiful as can be"* (24). The level of independence of a woman decreases during her pregnancy. It shows through the sentence which is quoted. In this quote, the narrator emphasizes that the man will help her to get something she needs. Pregnant women will be considered weak by the society and need to be helped by man.

### 3.3 Society Reaction towards Miscarriage

The narrator tries to emphasize the deficiency of pregnancy for every woman through the narration in the *Pregnant*. The happiness presented by She character is not the main narrative of the story. The Narrator in *Pregnant* not only tells of pregnancy and highlights the discomfort during that time. The narrator also tries to lead the reader to consider the decision to conceive and point out the possibilities that can occur during the nine months of pregnancy. One of the worst possibilities conveyed by the narrator is the possibility of miscarriage. Miscarriage experienced by She in the sixth month of her pregnancy.

Miscarriage experienced by She is something that may happen to any pregnant woman. In *Pregnant*, the narrator accentuated the public reaction around She. The reaction of the people around her who received her during a miscarriage was unexpectedly, silent and unfriendly, *"He places the monitor in another position but his movements are brusque and his face is old all of a sudden ... he answers: there's a problem, the fetus is not alive anymore"* (27), *"He tells her: 'We're about to spend some not-so-fun moments together'"* (27). The quotations illustrate how the doctor delivered bad news to She half-heartedly. There is no apprehension that showed by the medical personnel. Layne (2014) stated that miscarriage is taboo, cold, and unpleasant for women who experienced it. Not only that, doctors and other medical personnel are often silent when asked about the cause of miscarriage. Layne (2014) also explained that when women experience miscarriage, the whole world seems to be silent. In accordance with Layne's (2014) research, She also felt and received the same reaction from the medical when she miscarried. He did not receive the proper condolences for the loss.

Miscarriage experienced by She gave so much pain. A series of stages to empty her womb from a dead fetus had to be experienced. Disappointment experienced She was described so deeply by the narrator. Disappointment she felt not only because the pain but also the loss of prospective baby. She felt the disappointment at the attitude of the medical personnel around her that did not seem to care about her emotion after lost her baby, *"The only thing that she will not be able to figure out is why he said 'we are about to spend some not-very-fun moment ... '"* (28). The doctor only interests in how to handle the dead fetus, not She's emotion and feeling. This is so disturbing to She. She's disappointment got deeper as She realized there was no condolence She should have received from society around her.

In addition to the disappointment of the medical reactions that deal with her miscarriage, She also felt strong pressure when she had to go to her brother's wedding. In that happy atmosphere, She decides to not announce the tragedy she has just experienced, *"For the sake of the others, her grief can surely wait two days"* (29). The bitter experience that She face was a poison for her. The sad news of the miscarriage of a child in his womb cannot be said even to her family. This is considered as taboo, the miscarriage, but to keep it by herself is so torturing. The narrator gives a very tragic and ironic portrayal of women who decide to be pregnant. The story closes with a heart-breaking irony. A young woman approached She and stroked her belly, *"May I? ... They say it brings luck ... What did you want her to do? She tried to smile, of course"* (30). She as a woman who chooses to conceive in the end cannot cry even after her miscarriage just to fulfil the wishes of the social community.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Pregnancy for radical-liberal feminists is an obstacle in achieving equality between men and women. Radical-libertarian feminist choose literature to spread their idea about pregnancy and its oppression effect. This is very clearly conveyed by the narrator in the short story by Anna Gavalda entitled *Pregnant*. The presumption of pregnancy as a pebble by feminist radicals is not without reason. Pregnancy causes many changes in women physically and mentally. Changes as a result of this pregnancy are such as women will look weak and need a lot of help from men around her. This is what the radical-feminist want to avoid. This is the message from the "Pregnant" short story that want to share to the

reader. Through this short story, the reader will see why radical-libertarian feminist avoid pregnancy. It can be the oppression used against women.

Pregnancy which has a risk of miscarriage can be a boomerang for women. The social societies approve and believe miscarriage as a bad thing. They will not show their condolence to women who experience miscarriage. This action causes a double burden for women who experience the miscarriage. Miscarriage is certainly a great loss and very sad ending for pregnant women. However, women are required to comply with all the provisions established by the patriarchal system that has existed for a long time. The narrator in the story becomes a story taller for radical-libertarian feminists to proclaim their rejection toward pregnancy. Pregnancy is considered a trap built by the patriarchal system.

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