

Rebellious Women, Feminist Existentialism, and Film: Psychological Perspectives

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Abstract

Objectives: This study explores the theme of rebellious women in existential feminist theory, analyzing how female rebellion for freedom and truth is depicted in film. Specifically, it aims to examine the representation of such rebellion in *Poor Things*, a 2024 Oscar-winning film, through an existential feminist lens.

Methods: A qualitative-interpretive approach is employed, using *Poor Things* as the primary data source. Data analysis involves identification, extraction, interpretation, and presentation of themes related to feminist rebellion.

Results: The study identifies three primary contexts for female rebellion: sexuality, marriage, and death. Central to this rebellion is a symbolic act in which the female protagonist undergoes a brain transplant with a goat's brain in response to harm inflicted by a man, illustrating her psychological and physical reclamation of power. This narrative highlights women's empowerment over male dominance. The film's experimental form utilizes a non-linear, flashback-driven plot, with characters portrayed in dualistic terms: humanism and freedom on one side, and evil and exploitation on the other. The setting oscillates between past and present, rendered in both black-and-white and full-color aesthetics, underscoring the absurdity of modern life.

Conclusions: The film presents female rebellion as a path to freedom and truth, revealing the impact of male oppression and the enduring strength of women who resist it.

Keywords: Film; psychology; rebellion; feminism; existentialism; sexuality.

النساء المتمرديات، والوجودية النسوية، والفيلم: وجهات نظر نفسية

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ملخص

عينة البحث: المرأة المتمردي موضوع من الموضوعات المهمة في الدراسات النسوية الوجودية. تمردت المرأة لأجل الحصول على الحرية وتقديم الحقيقة في المجتمع. ولهذا، تهدف هذه المقالة إلى سرد صورة المرأة المتمردي في الأفلام باستخدام منظور نسوي وجودي.

منهجية البحث: هذا البحث بحث نوعي تفسيري. وكان مصدر البحث فلم *Poor Things*، وهو فلم حصل على جائزة الأوسكار (2024). وتتكون طريقة البحث من تحديد الهوية، والإكستراكتس، والتفسير، والتنقل.

نتائج البحث: تدل نتائج البحث على أن (1) تمرد المرأة في السياق الجنسي، و(2) تمرد المرأة في سياق الزواج، و(3) تمرد النساء في سياق الموت، وأما تمرد المرأة المهم فهو تمرد المرأة وسردها من خلال عملية زرع دماغ ذكر تم استبدالها بدماغ ماعز. وفعلت بيلا (*Bella*) ذلك رداً على الأذى الجسدي والنفسي الذي يقوم به الرجل. وتصور هذه الرواية المجازية تمكين المرأة على الرجل. من منظور الفيلم التجريبي، يتم سرد القصة في الفلاش باك والقفزات، ويتم تصوير التوصيف من خلال جانين للشخصية هما: الإنسانية والحرية والجانب الآخر الشر والسادية والدعارة. ويتم تقديم إعداد القصة في الأنماط الماضية والحالية باستخدام خلفيات بالأبيض والأسود وكاملة الألوان. هذا الفيلم جميل للغاية؛ لأنه يظهر تجربة الحياة الإنسانية الحديثة المليئة بالعثية.

الخلاصة: من خلال هذا الفيلم، فإن التمرد الذي قامت به المرأة هو جهد من أجل حرية المرأة، والتعبير عن حقيقة المرأة التي تعرضت للاضطهاد من قبل الرجل.

الكلمات الدالة: الفيلم، علم النفس، التمرد، النسوية، الوجودية، الجنس



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Introduction

Studies on modern women are currently widely discussed, spanning various contexts including philosophy (Connell & Janssen-Lauret, 2023; Bogodelnikova, 2023; Etieyibo & Tabensky, 2023), psychology (Choi, Kim, & Evans, 2022; Best & Gibbons, 2022; Gruber et al., 2021; Berke & DeFour, 2021), and even the fashion industry (Barber & Lobel, 2024; White, 2022). Furthermore, women's studies are also intertwined with arts and humanities, such as literature and film (Ahmadi, 2024, 2023). The study of women can never be separated from feminism, which is considered a movement for women so that they can be equal to men in various aspects of life (Moreton-Robinson, 2021; D'ignazio & Klein, 2023; Jones, 2023; Littler, 2023; Karides, 2013). The goal is to establish justice for women on a global scale.

The presentation of women's studies in the film context over the last five years is as follows: Women in the context of prostitution (Zhang & Fang, 2024; Baldwin, 2023; Jones, 2022); women in cultural contexts (Ida & Tuty, 2023); women in indigenous/local contexts (Basu & Tripathi, 2023; Vigil, 2021; DeCarvalho, 2021); women in racial contexts (Nwonka, 2021; Frymus, 2021; Benshoff & Griffin, 2021); and women in religious contexts (Harris & Skinazi, 2020). Research on women in the film context generally focuses more on the lives of women portrayed in films from various aspects.

Unfortunately, research on women in the film has largely overlooked women's philosophical perspectives. Exploring women's studies within the realm of philosophy is interesting, especially the women's movement, which is more focused on the big ideas/thoughts of women. As we all know, films containing women's themes are emerging. One relates to the theme of modern women with their philosophical thoughts. Hence, this study aims to bridge this gap by examining the portrayal of women in the film "Poor Thing" and their philosophical relevance, particularly within the framework of existentialism. Specifically, it is associated with existentialist feminism, a philosophy that promotes human freedom of will (Abbagnano & Fulvi, 2020; Lee & Mandelbaum, 2020). *Poor Things* is interesting to study because the film won Best Production Design, Best Makeup and Hairstyling, and Best Costume Design. Emma Stone, who portrays the main character, Bella, also received the prestigious Best Artist Award at the 2024 Oscars. The character Bella in the film strongly advocates inner freedom and voices truths that are relevant when examined from the perspective of existentialist feminism. The main study of this study, leads to two things. First, raising the construction of existential feminism in the film *Poor Things* in a psychological context. Second, raising the relationship between film structure and existential feminism in the context of experimental film.

In general, the film *Poor Things* tells the story of a pregnant woman who commits suicide by jumping off a bridge. However, the woman is not completely dead. The woman's body is still alive, while her brain is dead. A doctor performs surgery and a total change on the woman. Her body is grafted with the brain of a baby (which she is carrying). As a result, a woman is born named Bella (the body of an adult woman, but the brain is still a baby). In her life journey, she longs for the freedom that is as free as possible. Starting from the freedom to seek knowledge, have sexual relations, to the freedom of women in finding their identity. This freedom is the central theme in the study of existential psychology. In the context of feminism, the theme of the film *Poor Things* has relevance to existential (psychological) feminism which voices women's freedom in various segments of life (Mckenzie, 2024), starting from education, work, marriage, politics, economics, social, culture, to sexuality and the search for God.

Existentialist feminism was pioneered by Beauvoir's thinking (O'Brien & Embree, 2001; Tidd, 2008). Historically, Beauvoir's existentialist feminism cannot be separated from the influence of the philosophy of existentialism pioneered by Sartre (1946). The main concept of the philosophy of existentialism is a human being who 'exists' in the world (Sartre, 2001, 1972, 1966), 2021). Humans are figures who have the freedom to determine their will as a complete human being. As for existentialist feminist philosophy, it is a feminist philosophy that has the concept of women's freedom to have will in the world (Beauvoir, 1949, 1962). Beauvoir's view is based on the fact that women in biological, psychological, and sociological contexts are often defeated and shackled by men with the power of their patriarchal culture. Nicholas (2022, p. 226), in Beauvoir's view, characterizes freedom as "freedom as purposive action". The goal of freedom is to achieve equality between women and men, with women also anticipated to excel beyond men at a higher level.

When tracing the traces of existentialist feminism, it can be examined through biographies (Bell & Yalom, 1990;

Lidström Brock & Lidström Brock, 2016), fiction/literature (Wagner, 2023; Rizvi & Abbasi, 2023), or film (Akopov, 2023). All of these mediums explore the theme of women's freedom and rebellion across various segments, from domestic/household life to the realms of work and/or politics. Women's freedom is related to women's actions in facing all the problems and complexities that exist in life. The rebellion was carried out by women when they faced a system that was considered unfavorable to them. This impartiality towards women has an impact on their socio-economic and political lives.

The concept of rebellion appears in various types (Aho et al., 2024) and is contingent upon context. Some existentialist philosophers, such as Camus (1991a, 199b), discuss rebellion against modern society. Historically, modern society has not been completely correct in terms of ethics, evidenced by the prevalence of wars resulting in numerous innocent casualties. These realities have prompted existentialists to set aside somewhat the notion of God, giving rise to atheist existentialism as a manifestation of disbelief in God. Meanwhile, Kierkegaard (1998) discusses rebellion in a religious/spiritual context. Unlike Camus, Kierkegaard was a theistic existentialist because he believed in God. Fundamentally, the rebellion carried out by existentialists mostly leads to rebellion against society (Aho, 2020), which is considered no/less relevant to the existential view. Apart from that, rebellion from an existential perspective is one of the existence of humans who have freedom of will.

Regarding women's rebellion, Beauvoir (1949) emphasized that women should not submit to men. Women should be capable of standing independently without relying on men. This is to show that women are individuals who have freedom. Women should rebel against any oppression from men. Moreover, women must be aware and able to control themselves as authentic creatures and not rely on men. If women submit to men, they are not truly free but under male domination. One of the bonds between men and women is marriage. As Delphy (2016) elucidated, within marriage, women frequently experience oppression from men.

The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative-interpretive (Saldaña, 2021, 2011; Creswell, 2018; Ahmadi, 2021, 2022, 2023; Ahmadi et al, 2023), which involves narrating data based on the researcher's interpretation. In this qualitative context, researchers function both as interpreters and as constructors of findings. The primary data source utilized is the film *Poor Things* (Lantimos, 2023). The data analysis technique involved identifying instances of women's rebellion in the film *Poor Things*, extracting relevant data, interpreting it, and presenting the findings. Researchers applied the concept of 'sequential flow,' as outlined by Neuman (2014), which denotes an iterative process conducted throughout the research stages to enhance the comprehensiveness of the results. To ensure data validity, researchers employed the 'intersubjectivity' technique, involving discussions of the data with colleagues (Stolorow, Atwood, & Brancha, 1994). This was undertaken to reduce potential biases and subjectivity in the interpretation of data and construction of research findings.

The Rebellion of Existential Feminism

Sexual Rebellion

Women, according to Beauvoir's (1949) perspective, represent the 'second sex,' thus sexually positioned as subordinate to men. Women are expected to submit and obey men in sexual matters. Based on the observations of Jackson (2013), Lorde (1997), Gimenez (2005), and Collins (2017), it is evident that women experience sexual oppression by men. To counteract this oppression, women must engage in sexual rebellion. In fact, Littauer (2015) emphasized that women who are still teenagers often rebel by engaging in premarital sexual relationships. This shows that women do not need to submit to issues of sexuality within the boundaries of men. They, as women, can have sexual relations with any man at any time. Similar to the view of existentialism, sex is freedom (Fullbrook & Fullbrook, 2008). Sex should not shackle or objectify individuals as mere sexual objects.

Existentialist feminist women promote the concept that women must be able to rebel against issues of sexuality that men have dominated. Women must be able to determine their attitudes regarding sexual matters to avoid experiencing a crisis of sexual confidence. Women must be able to trust themselves with their sexuality. Sexual rebellion among women does not only stop in the context of heterosexuality; lesbian sexuality is also a form of sexy rebellion (Foster, 2021). Lesbian women carry out sexual rebellion, which shows that women can do anything related to matters of sexuality, including

choosing their sexual partners, whether of the same sex or otherwise (Stein, 1992; Latimer, 2005). In the view of Podmore & Tremblay (2016), this type of feminism is the concretization of the 'second wave'. At a more substantive stage, Myers (2003) states that this movement advocates for sexual freedom, the destigmatization, and depoliticization of lesbianism/sex.

Until now, lesbian/same-sex women who are included in the LGBT category are still controversial (Ahmadi, 2024; Bernstein, 2016; Bernstein & Taylor, 2013). This controversy is caused by society's acceptance of lesbianism, which is still considered abnormal sexuality. According to the American Psychological Association, from the 1970s onwards, it was recommended that LGBT should no longer be included in the category of abnormal psychology studies (Glassgold et al., 2009). Moreover, several European and American countries have legalized same-sex marriage (see Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; Feng, 2024). Consequently, in *Poor Thing*, the character Bella engaged not only in sexual relations with men but also with women. The type of sexual behaviour carried out by Bella cannot be separated from her rebellion against sexuality. As an existential woman, she fiercely shows that women should not be bound by heterosexuality. Women can also engage in same-sex sexuality as a form of freedom in choosing a partner. If visualized, the following is a sequence of Bella's sexual rebellion.

No.	No. Category of sexual rebellion	Scenes
1	Sexual rebellion by having premarital sexual relations	Bella had premarital sexual relations with men she knew, for example, Duncan Wedderburn, Max McCandles, and others.
2	Sexual rebellion in having sexual relations with more than one man	Bella became a prostitute and engaged in sexual relations with anyone.
3	Sexual rebellion through engaging in same-sex/lesbian sexual relations	Bella had sexual relations with female friends and pimps named Madame Swiney and Toinette.
4	Sexual rebellion in having sexual relations with oneself/masturbating	Bella masturbated by inserting her finger into her vagina. This means she got sexual pleasure by herself.

The sexual rebellion carried out by Bella in various aspects, ranging from seeking sexual pleasure through exploring her own body to engaging in sexual relations with individuals of the same sex, is a form of women's movement. In this context, Bella demonstrated that as a woman, she is free to do anything related to her inherent sexuality. However, this freedom in an existential view cannot be separated from the responsibility (Reynolds, 2014; Mart, 2012; Flynn, 2009) of an existential woman. She must be accountable for her actions. All actions taken are her responsibility and hers alone, not that of anyone else's.

Marriage Rebellion

In traditional society, marriage is a sacred thing and carries high social status. Individuals who remain unmarried are often deemed unworthy and tend to receive a bad stigma in society. Therefore, traditional societies commonly practice arranged marriages facilitated by the families of the prospective bride and groom, with the aim of expediting marriage, often at a young age (Saadawi, 1986), to circumvent negative societal perceptions. However, in the modern era, such as the present, "marriage itself has lost its power." (Auchmuty, 2012). The diminishing strength of marriage stems from various factors. Firstly, the voices of feminists urge women to leave the marriage (Smart, 1984, 1989, 2007; Booth, 2018). Secondly, the evolving lifestyles of contemporary women increasingly prioritize career and personal freedom over marriage (La Rowe, 1978; Traister, 2016).

According to feminist perspectives, marriage is perceived as a constraint and limitation on women's freedom. Various authors, such as Szirotny (2022, 2015), argue that marriage poses a significant challenge for women, often resulting in suffering. This is because women do not have anything when they are married. Saadawi (2015) asserts that marriage serves as a pretext for men to exploit religion as a means of further oppressing women. Moreover, contemporary women view marriage as a source of discontentment (Sargent, 1981; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Hartman, 2015), leading them to rebel against it.

In *Poor Things*, Bella was advised to marry by her father, Godwin Baxter. However, Bella, as an existentialist feminist

woman, rejected this notion. She refused to marry because she desired to explore the world. She wanted to explore and travel around the world. She refused to conform to the traditional role of a domesticated woman confined to the home, preferring instead to embrace the adventures the world has to offer. This aspect of her character is evident in the following scene.

00:38:42,208 --> 00:38:44,27

And when I return,
We marriage,
(Lanthimos, 2023)

Bella wanted to get out of the house. She also became angry when her father forbade her from leaving the house. The father felt that the world outside the home was the most dangerous place for his daughter, Bella. However, Bella, as a woman who had a great desire for freedom, longed to leave the house. She resisted the notion of marriage until she felt she had fully experienced the world. Bella is a woman who truly rebelled in her marriage even though her future husband, Max McCandles, said that he was ready to marry Bella. However, Bella still ignored him, and she wanted to be an adventurous woman. She desired to be free. Bella traveled around the world with a man named Duncan Wedderburn. Eventually, Bella fulfilled her promise to marry Max, the man she loves. She also asked Max McCandles to marry him. However, during Max McCandles and Bella's wedding ceremony at the church, an unexpected revelation occurred when a man named General Alfred Blessington appeared, claiming to be Bella's previous husband. Bella was asked to leave by General Alfred Blessington; he said that Bella, in the past, was named Victoria, and she experienced mental disorders and hysteria, so she ran away from home.

02:01:02,273 --> 02:01:04,198

I would like to go.
(Lanthimos, 2023)

Bella went with a man who claimed to be her husband. The wedding procession at the church ultimately failed because Bella abandoned Max. As a woman, Bella wants to recognize her true identity. Is it true that in the past, she was the wife of General Alfred Blessington? Bella's action was an extraordinary act of rebellion because she dared to disrupt her wedding procession. Not all women within a household or marriage would dare such a feat. Bella's rebellion against marriage was carried out based on two things. Firstly, she wanted to explore the world. She aspired to enjoy as much freedom as possible, unrestricted by the domestic confines of a housewife limited by household chores. Secondly, Bella sought self-discovery as a woman. Hence, when confronted by a man claiming to be her previous husband, Bella did not resist. Her profound curiosity regarding her true identity prompted this decision. Rebellion within marriage signifies the quest for modern women's identity (Worthen, 2022; Moore & Stathi, 2020), asserting that women hold an equal position to men in marital affairs. Women, exemplified by Bella in this context, demonstrate their capability to rebel against marriage and assert their autonomy to explore the world and engage in sexual adventures with other men without being tethered by marital constraints. She also wants to show that she is a person who has an existence as a new human being. Even, a new woman. This image is seen in the following dialogue in the film *Poor Things*.

01:34:16,073 --> 01:34:17,554

-A new girl?
- Yes...
(Lanthimos, 2023)

The dialogue represents that a woman named Bella wants to show not only herself, but to the world. She wants to show

that women in the household, in marriage, also have an existence. This view is inseparable from the existentialist view which carries the view that women are figures who have an existence that precedes essence. Thus, women are figures who have freedom in their existence and they (women), can become women who are categorized as new humans and new women with a new existence. Women should not be bound by men in marriage. Women must be able to be equal to men in marriage.

Rebellion against Death

Death is a mysterious theme and remains a mystery to this day. Historically, Socrates in ancient Greece emphasized death as an ultimate truth (Wilson, 2007), asserting that humans should not fear confronting death when it comes to them. In modern times, death has become a central theme explored by existentialist thinkers, beginning with Kierkegaard (1959), Heidegger (1967), Nietzsche (1954), and Sartre (1964). Existentialist perspectives on death share a common concept: it is an unavoidable aspect of human existence. Therefore, every individual will ultimately confront death (Kokosalakis, 2020; Shims, 2020). Fear and anxiety sometimes haunt humans when facing death, as not all possess the courage to confront it. However, from the existentialist viewpoint, death represents human freedom and liberation.

From a psychological perspective, particularly within psychoanalysis, humans harbor two desires within themselves: the desire for life (eros) and the desire for death (thanatos). These two desires compete with each other within humans (Freud, 1920; Chessick, 1990; Kastenbaum, 2000). On one hand, an individual may embrace life during moments of joy. However, they may contemplate death during times of sorrow. Both eros and thanatos are individual choices. Everyone has their own chosen path. Those who lean towards death may do so through two pathways: religious/spiritual or personal/non-religious. Therefore, it is possible to find mass suicides committed by religious sects. Nonetheless, suicides can also be carried out by individuals with no affiliation to a specific sect, religion, or spirituality. The depiction in the film *Poor Things* shows women rebelling against death as seen in the following narrative.

00:22:25,674 --> 00:22:27,736

I knew nothing of the life
she had abandoned

00:22:27,872 --> 00:22:31,936

except she hated it so much
that she had chosen not to be,

00:22:32,071 --> 00:22:33,338

and forever.

(Lanthimos, 2023)

In *Poor Things*, Bella (as the story at the beginning of the film is narrated) committed suicide by jumping from a bridge. She committed suicide because she could not stand her sadistic husband. She (Bella) also hates that her life has been full of suffering. It is narrated in the film that her husband like to hurt her physically and psychologically. On the other hand, at the time of her suicide, Bella was pregnant. What Bella did as a woman was her rebellion against death. She wanted to equip herself for a life that was hard and painful for her. Suicide in this context is Bella's choice as a form of rebellion. For this reason, she sought a way to freedom through death. Feeling isolated and unable to find solace, Bella's loneliness contributed to her deepening sadness, eventually leading to her suicide. In an existential context, someone who experiences loneliness will cause depression (Yalom, 2001; Walsh & McElwain, 2002), making it easier for someone to commit suicide.

Similarly, as Bella experienced deepening loneliness, her sadness intensified as well. This ultimately led her to commit suicide. Conversely, as her loneliness grew, so did her inclination towards death (thanatos), gradually emerging and

expanding over time. Initially, death was merely a concept, but with time, it evolved into the act of suicide. Bella's suicide was not influenced by any specific religious or spiritual beliefs. Therefore, Bella's action concerning suicide was purely a form of human existence free of will, as glorified by existentialism.

Rebellion and the Quest for Modern Women's Identity

Bella's rebellion as a woman, both in the context of sex, marriage, and death, represents her quest for identity. Her actions mirror the contemporary lives of women. As an existential woman, she is a figure who is free to do anything. She has freedom of will and existence in life. However, this freedom is still within the corridor of responsibility that is promoted and upheld by existentialists. Therefore, in Sartre's (1946) perspective, existential people are people who adhere to the idea of responsible freedom. According to Kaufmann (1975), existentialists are considered individualistic figures. They challenge societal norms due to perceived incongruence with existential principles. Advocates of liberating existentialism, they sometimes clash with society in pursuit of freedom, resulting in rebellion. Aside from that, it is through the rebellion for freedom undertaken by existentialists, who are categorized under responsible freedom, that they become humanistic individuals. The actions taken by existentialists are actions that are imbued with responsibility and stem from self-awareness, rather than coercion from others. This is what leads existentialists to understand that other people are 'alternative' considerations for determining something.

If traced, Bella, as a woman, carried out a rebellion that started from within herself, a rebellion within the family, a rebellion with the people she loved, and even a rebellion with other people and society. Rebellion, for existential women, represents liberation from all forms of constraint. Rebellion is the desire to be free from everything, including dismantling the rules that are sometimes considered to limit women's freedom. According to Aho (2020), existential rebellion arises from the misguided and rigid norms prevalent in society. In the context of *Poor Things*, Bella's existential rebellion primarily revolves around her quest for freedom as a woman in pursuit of self-authenticity and rebellion, entwined with the aspiration to liberate herself from patriarchal dominance. The concept of breaking free from patriarchal power stands as a central theme in existential feminism. Hence, societal norms depicted in *Poor Things* continue to perpetuate the expectation for women to adhere to domestic roles. Within the patriarchal system, there exists apprehension that women's defiance of patriarchal norms may lead to rebellion against the patriarchal order. Such rebellion is viewed as detrimental to the patriarchal system, which has always tended to control and oppress women.

Bella's rebellion against society is indeed freedom. However, the most important thing in this rebellion was speaking out the truth. Bella represents women trying to 'voice the truth' through their rebellion. She shows that women do not have to be obedient and submissive figures to men. This is done in terms of speaking the truth. Women and men are equals as human beings, thus, there is no need for submission. Due to this, she declined her father's request for her to remain at home and not travel around the world. Furthermore, Bella boldly called off her engagement to Max because she desired to explore the world and discover her true self. During her global travels, she engaged in sexual relations with various partners as a demonstration that women should not be constrained by societal norms regarding sexuality, which have historically restricted women. In an existential context, referring to Kierkegaard's (1991) view, true humans do rebel against society. Society, within the existential view (in this case, limited to the crowd), is untruthful (Tuttle, 1996). Likewise, Bella rebelled to voice the truth found in modern society. This rebellion cannot be separated from the revolution (Selbin, 2010), which must be upheld by people who are concerned to truth.

Women engaging in rebellion is ethically justifiable. However, they must be prepared for all the consequences. Likewise, Bella, as a woman who rebelled, was considered as someone who had violated the ethical norms prevalent in modern society. Additionally, she was perceived as an oddity because she refused to conform to societal expectations. Bella, as a rebel, was well aware of the potential repercussions, yet she persisted in following what she believed to be true. In connection with the issue of obedience, Fromm (1981) emphasized that individuals who disobey are those who fight for the truth. This category of people is few because they dare to go against the currents, laws, or ethics in society. Those who disobey must also be prepared for the consequences of receiving punishment from society, which may include verbal

admonishment, ethical scrutiny, or even imprisonment.

In relation to the women's movement, women's rebellion, the character Bella in *Poor Things* shows her identity as a modern woman. In her discussion with her husband, she admits that she is a woman who was once a prostitute. As a prostitute, Bella does not feel ashamed or sad, she enjoys and enjoys it. In the view of existentialist women, they are women who have the most freedom possible. Freedom that is the identity of modern women. Freedom that does not bind women to be anything. The narrative is seen in the following dialogue excerpt.

02:04:30,209 --> 02:04:31,537

Wedderburn says
you were a whore.

02:04:31,672 --> 02:04:33,705

I suspect that was part...
Bella: I was.

02:04:33,840 --> 02:04:35,007

In Paris.

02:04:35,142 --> 02:04:37,668

I tired of it,
but it was fascinating.

02:04:38,938 --> 02:04:39,938

Right.

(Lanthimos, 2023)

In the final act, Bella's rebellion transformed into resistance. Facing imminent harm from a man named Alfred Blessington, Bella refused to stay silent. Instead, she escalated the confrontation to its extreme by shooting Alfred Blessington. Bella's retaliation did not end there; she went further by performing a brain transplant, replacing Alfred Blessington's brain with a goat's brain. Bella's action made Alfred Blessington, a man, into a goat-brained human figure. This is a metaphor for Bella's rebellion as a woman, which ends in resistance against the men who hurt her physically and psychologically. Bella made Alfred Blessington a goat, an animal that always obeys its master. In this context, women are the rulers, while men are subject to their power. Bella's actions as an existential figure exemplify Camus's (1991) conceptualization that rebellion embodies both optimism and pessimism. Camus's perspective is closely tied to Sisyphus' philosophy of absurdity, which is at the point: happy and sad, optimistic and pessimistic. Sisyphus experienced great joy when he successfully pushed the rock to the mountaintop. However, his mood soured when he realized the rock had to be rolled back down. Raising and lowering the stone became an endless curse for Sisyphus. In this instance, Bella emerges as a figure of rebellion infused with optimism. As a result, she truly became an existential woman who voiced the truth that exists in society, namely the power of men to oppress, hurt, and dominate women.

Poor Things and Experimental Films

The film *Poor Things* is a film that depicts the movement of existentialist feminist women in fighting for and seeking freedom on a macro scale in modern life. The existentialist feminist women in the film *Poor Things* are narrated by the director through a long and winding journey of seeking freedom. Kennedy (2024) shows in detail and depth that *Poor*

Things as an experimental film is able to show well the segmentation of highlights related to the narrative of the modern world and the non-modern world. This is what is included in the world of literary art. The director in the film *Poor Things* also shows a portrait of the past life of the character with black and white images, while the present is highlighted with modern images.

If related to the structure of the film, the film *Poor Things* is categorized in a flashback and jump plot. This film at the beginning narrates a woman who committed suicide. Suddenly, the next narrative appears, a woman who seems innocent who is cared for by a doctor. In another segment, there is a narrative of a doctor who is sued for reviving a woman who was considered dead. In the next narrative, a woman named Bella, becomes an existential woman, she searches for her identity as a woman: starting from traveling to various countries, having free sex, discussions and lectures to deepen her knowledge. At the end of the film, it is narrated that Bella as an existential woman already understands and recognizes herself. She rebels against her husband and also other people who she considers to be shackling her freedom. The narrative in this film is made to jump around so that the audience is invited to think quickly and jump around. This is what confuses the audience. However, in this context the film becomes aesthetic. From the aspect of the characters, the film *Poor Things* presents a portrait of humans in the past and present that actually have not changed. On the one hand, there is a figure who is sadistic, evil, hypocritical, a prostitute. On the other hand, there is a human being who is humanistic, good, and has spiritual values. In Jung's perspective (2014), this type is called an archetype, in the past, present, and future, this type of human will not change because that is the basic type of human.

From the setting aspect, the film *Poor Things* shows an extraordinary aesthetic. The setting is depicted with a portrait of the past world, the present world, big cities, brothels, educational institutions, and operating places. The director in this film offers multiple settings in the hope that the audience will not get bored with the settings that appear. However, the settings that appear quickly and in different places require insight in understanding so that the audience does not lose understanding of the setting of the place in the film *Poor Things*.

Conclusion

The rebellious woman in the film *Poor Things* serves as a portrayal of existential female rebellion. Existential women rebel against society for two reasons. Firstly, the rebellion carried out by existential women against society is a concretization of human freedom. As women, they are free to do anything. However, in this context, the freedom exercised is responsible freedom, not freedom that is brutal and causes criminality in society. Secondly, existential women rebel against society because they perceive something as not 'right'. As a result, they rebel to articulate the truth within a society that is governed and controlled by patriarchy.

The rebellion carried out by Bella, the main character in the film, includes three main aspects. Firstly, in the matter of sexuality, Bella engaged in various free sexual encounters, ranging from pleasuring herself through masturbation, engaging in sexual relations with multiple men without marital ties, resorting to prostitution, to engaging in same-sex/lesbian relations. Secondly, rebellion within the context of marriage: Bella rejected marriage proposals because she desired to explore the world. Apart from that, Bella also refused the wedding procession when a man invited her to get to know/know about her past. Thirdly, rebellion in the context of death, Bella commits suicide by throwing herself into the river. This act was undertaken as an attempt to find a path to freedom for herself.

The film *Poor Things* is more powerful in depicting the rebellious attitude within modern existential women. On one hand, modern women rebel for existential freedom and speak their truth. When societal ethics are deemed irrelevant, women are ready to rebel and resist. On the other hand, modern women who ultimately rebel also acknowledge the ethical standards prevalent in society. In this case, the ethics existing in society are categorized as correct and do not enslave women to men. From the perspective of experimental film, the film *Poor Things* is able to raise a narrative that flashback jumps that have many plot twists so that it requires a deep understanding of this film. From the aspect of the characters, the characters are presented with multi-interpretive psychology, hypocrisy, sadism, prostitution, and also humanism. This shows a deep portrait of modern humans who are full of personas, hypocrisy and lies. But on the other hand, there is still freedom,

humanism, and goodness. In addition, from the aspect of the setting, this film depicts an extraordinary setting jump so that the audience does not get bored.

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