

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Depiction of female characters in literature has been the issue of feminist literary criticism since a long time ago. Female characters who male authors wrote tend to have patterns of being inferior, weak, and a mere completion to the male characters. Many female characters are stereotypically written to be passive, to be wives and mothers of someone, never to be a person in their own right without having to be entailed to their relationship to someone else. The female characters are most likely presented and valued only in their emotional, maternal, and domestic roles which implies that other roles are presented into the male character (Radway 170).

These characteristics obviously makes reader find it is hard to like these female characters. Lack of respect for women becomes the driving force as to why female character in literature are often portrayed wrongly by male authors. Historically, there has been a bias in the literary world towards favoring works by male authors, which has resulted in a disproportionate recognition and popularity of male-authored works compared to those by female authors. This bias can be attributed to various factors, including societal norms, cultural expectations, and limited opportunities for women to pursue writing and publishing. Therefore, the literary canon, which often consists of predominantly male authors, has traditionally defined what is considered "great literature," excluding many talented and influential female authors from recognition.

As a result, sexism and misogyny in literature were born from this depiction of female characters by male authors. As argued by Eagleton in *Feminist Literary Criticism* (1991), literature written by males perhaps does not always reflect reality (11). In his hand, literature can be manipulative, it can provide the reader with an indication of the misogyny of certain writers and our culture generally. The false depiction of women by male authors is considered a misogynous attitude.

Sexism is discriminatory against one sex in favor of the other. Sexism can also be defined as the belief that people of one gender are inherently superior to people of the other gender (Powell 59). Although sexism are prejudice and assumption against men and women, most of the time, the victim of this attitude is women. The male character will be presented in positive abilities, traits, interests and activities, while the negative sides will be given to female character. Living in patriarchal society justifies this phenomenon to happen. These sexist beliefs are needed to maintain the authority of men in the society. A female character such as Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* comes out as manipulative, dangerous, and immoral simply because she seeks for power. Shakespeare is only one example of famous male author who shows refusal and anxiety in the face of women's power. The idea that women can be as powerful as a man intimidates men, even if the women in the context is fictional. Thus, the representation of female characters in literature for years have been submissive, weak, and subordinate to the male character. From this it can be recognized that many literatures especially if it is written by male authors consist of misogynistic idea. Misogyny is hatred toward women. In literature, misogyny attitudes reflected in plays,

poems, stories, and novels that attack women into belittling, dominating, rejecting, replacing, objectifying and devaluing the female characters (Somerville 381).

Certainly, sexism and misogyny found in literary work is a serious matter to be analyzed since ignoring these attitudes can only lead to problems. Female character in literature should be depicted in equal traits and qualities just like male character in order to emphasize and shape reader's understanding that women is capable of developing themselves to a whole individual with freedom, choices, and aspirations without having to obey to those stereotypes or assumptions about their sex. However, it is hard to accomplish this purpose if literature is only written from male voices and their biased opinions. Not until the development of feminist movement arrives in the part where the focus of feminism with literature is to study literature by women and distinguish women's problem in the said literary work. According to Plain and Sellers (2007), women's writing is important as it can address the matter of women oppression and spread feminist consciousness to the reader (108). Since the plot of literary works written by women are taken directly from women's perspective, the representation of women through the female characters come out better than the men's writing.

In recent years, literary work written by women usually offers powerful female characters to the reader. From Showalter, literary work is utilized by female authors to change patterns in literary history that female characters should be hidden and silent instead, women can be heroic and passionate. She believes that it can happen because literature by female authors tends to liberate from patriarchal authority as a way to put some perspective to the reader on how wronged women have been treated in a

patriarchal society. Depicting women to be powerful, which is different from the cultural stereotype such as sexism, has been done by many female authors nowadays.

One of the female authors who believes through her writing she can fight for women in this man-centric world is Taylor Jenkins Reid. She is an American author who is active in writing essays and novels as well. She was born in Maryland and now living her life with her family in Los Angeles. In the book community, Reid's name is always identically known as author of rich, famous, and prestigious female characters. Most of her characters in novels are written as famous, wealthy, scandalous, and big people who will stumble upon conflict once the general public is involved to criticize her characters. Reid likes to write about navigating the world as a woman in a man's world. Her female characters revolve based on the idea that these female characters fighting for their right to be exactly who they are without judgement or control. One of her beloved and most selling novels is *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. Although the novel was published in 2017, the novel only comes to reader's recognition in 2021 after entering the *New York Times Best Seller list* and until now has been sitting there for 109 weeks with over 1 million copies sold (Data from New York Times Best Sellers List July 2023).

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo follows a story about a fictional famous and scandalous Hollywood actress named Evelyn Hugo who finally ready to tell her thirty years life working as an actress in the world of men. Along with the help from Monique—the unknown journalist whom she believes can discover her true-life story and turn it into a biography book—Evelyn tells the behind story of her seven marriages.

Hollywood for years is known as a white man space, therefore there are so many rules about behaving and appearing that Evelyn needs to follow in order to be welcomed in that man-dominated place.

Certainly, it is hard to believe that a woman had been married seven times. Reid hinges reader by liberating to write that in her novel, a woman can. Through Evelyn, Reid captures a deeply glamorous and scandalous woman who fight so hard to get her name in Hollywood. She portrays how Evelyn as a woman is quick to be blamed and affected by the decisions of men. Having six of seven marriages to end in divorce surely invites so many questions from the society on Evelyn's credibility of being a "good woman" and a "good wife". Based on this premise, Reid captures how male characters in the story keep making pretty big mistakes and failures to keep their marriage, and yet society never blames them for that. Instead, Evelyn is forced to deal with the consequences of her male counterpart's action.

The novel provides an example of a female character who fights against sexism and misogyny in a patriarchal society. Evelyn proves that living in a male-dominated world costs her a price which is to be dictated to follow cultural stereotypes since patriarchy believes it can keep her as a woman in her place. Being a woman in Hollywood demands she to put herself at risk to sacrifice everything she loves in order to fill the expectation people have of her as an ideal celebrity. However, Evelyn is portrayed by Reid as someone who does not like to be controlled. Reid creates Evelyn as this very beautiful yet complex woman, she is flawed and messy, she has done some ugly things to achieve her dreams in Hollywood because, once again, being a woman

who is ambitious enough to have something and get what she wants is never an easy task. Due to her complicated personality and refusal to behave based on cultural stereotypes (sexism), it can be seen in the novel that Evelyn is hated by the majority of people at her time. The writer believes this hatred society has for her happens because she is a woman who is fully aware of her ability and power, therefore, she is seen by misogynist people in the novel as a threat to masculinity and to other patriarchal authorities.

Based on the aforementioned reason above, the writer believes this research is useful to prove several things. First, the writer believes studying a literary work written by female authors such as the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* can contribute to developing the women's writing in general so that literature by women will not be underestimated compared to literature by men. Second, in recent years discussion of sexism and misogyny increased both among media and scholars (Walker 2). The term widely and frequently used as examples of patriarchal products. Therefore, this research aims to provide a better understanding of sexism and misogyny in a literary text. Third, the remaining fact that the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* is still rising in fame amongst book community such as Booktok, Bookstagram, and Goodreads readers as a beautiful book about women in the glamour Hollywood who seeks love and dreams. This fact can inspire other female authors to start writing about women since only women know their own experience living in a patriarchal society, so no literary work depicts female characters as the weak and obedient ones to set up patriarchal standards. The writer also believes by promoting and introducing more

wonderful literary work by female authors, this research can provide an example of how mesmerizing and creative a female author can be in criticizing and rejecting patriarchal society in her writing. Therefore, the writer proposes this research as **“Sexism and Misogyny as Products of Patriarchal Society Seen in Taylor Jenkins Reid’s Novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*”**.

1.2 Identification of the Problems

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo follows the story of Evelyn Hugo who has seven marriages, and none of her marriages last to the end. It is also told Evelyn is a fictional legend and an icon in Hollywood which means through her life, people have been keeping eyes to watch and criticize her life in newspapers, magazines, and tabloids. Broadly speaking, having seven marriages makes society define Evelyn as a wicked and foolish woman who cannot keep her marriage. In addition to that, society insists on blaming her instead of her husband for not keeping the sacred meaning of a marriage. While it seems like society always notices her first because she is a woman, the problem also can be seen when society only remembers her husbands’ names instead of her when she accomplishes and achieves something in her career. The aforementioned events happening to Evelyn is a women’s problem due to double standard in a patriarchal society. Initially, the double standards are also the root of sexism and misogyny attitudes which are the main problems in the novel.

The writer believes there are many messages worth to be analyzed and ideas of feminism delivered by Reid in the novel. Such as, even though she represents empowered female character like Evelyn in her novel, the experience of Evelyn living

in a patriarchal society and Evelyn's thoughts and feelings dealing with society's interference with her personal life is actually Reid's complicated and indirect way to criticize patriarchal society.

1.3 Review of Related Literature

Research on sexism and misogyny has been a significant area of study including the field of literary criticism and feminist theory. Scholars have examined various genres, time periods, and individual authors to uncover and analyse instances of sexism and misogyny in literature. The writer has read several related researches on literature discussing the sexism and misogyny with intention to improve the writer's understanding of how gender dynamics are constructed, perpetuated, and challenged especially in literature. Information gained from these related literatures will be discussed below.

The first article taken from Wilma J. Pyle entitled "Sexism in Children's Literature" (1976). This article addresses the need to eliminate sexism from literature for children as the inherent dangers of this belief can influence how children unconsciously learn regarding their traditional and expected gender roles. The finding of this article shows from 154 picture books, 13 of which included no women at all. Of the books which did portray women, 83 percent of them depicted women in homemaking roles, while only 17 percent were portrayed in more professional roles. Because of that, the article confronts and argues the need for social changes, specifically in literature for children. Books for the younger generation should reflect

a much more positive and healthier female image. Depiction of character should be not biased so that girls and boys know that girls can be interesting people, that the character of girls in books can and should develop beyond the stereotypes so commonly found, and that girls can and should be free to make choices about themselves and their career aspirations. As the present writer's own research is focused on depiction of female characters who are free from sexism and misogyny in the novel by female author, this article is helpful to support the writer's analysis and arguments upon the reason why the female author in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* rejects sexism and misogyny.

The second article is derived from Albert J. Kingston and Terry Lovelace article entitled "Sexism and Reading: A Critical Review of Literature" (1977). This article offers understanding in the use of literary criticism to determine sexism and stereotyping in texts. This article argues that in criticizing various works as being sexist, a literary critic should investigate the frequency of male and female names, depictions in illustrations or pronouns in a literary work. Then, this article studies five of the great authors of Western literary tradition who appeared to be sexist writers who hated women. The finding shows how Pandora and Creation myths blamed women for the world's evil, how Homer showed women only as spoils of battle, Shakespeare disrespecting women with his line "frailty, thy name is a woman", Chaucer who depicts his female character as the ultimate sex object since she was married five times, and Milton with his "Eve is a narcissistic wanton". This article is necessary to be used by the writer in conducting this research since this article proves sexism and misogyny within literature indeed exists and is concerning. Sexism and misogyny are oppressive

social attitudes based on the fundamental belief in the natural inferiority of women. The writer can use this criterion and compare whether the same attitudes or depictions also exist in the novel that can be analyzed in the writer's own research.

The third article is taken from Tyas and Mustofa article entitled "Sexism in C.S Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*" (2019). This article identifies the fact that C.S Lewis as a male author plays a significant role in the existence of sexism in the novel. Openly, female characters in the novel are depicted as less strong and smart than the male characters. Lewis and his male characters also show benevolent sexism toward the female characters, such as prohibiting them to fight with men in the war but insisting them to please the male characters. This article reflects the wrong depiction of female character implies the wrong biased perspective that Lewis has as a male author, he thinks that naturally females cannot fight in battle or offer opinion on making strategy. Since the writer's own research studies the sexism and misogyny in the novel by a female author, this article is quite helpful and interesting to be used to compare the differences between male and female authors in preserving sexism in their writing.

The fourth article is taken from Munawarrah and Suryani (2022) article entitled "Sexist Socialization Experienced by Female Protagonists in Anthology Short Story Translated by Dayla Cohen-Mor." This article uses feminist theory: margin to center bell hook (1984) in aligning the discussion of sexist attitudes experienced by the female characters from the compilation of Arabian short stories. The result of the research shows how the female characters become depressed and marginalized because of the physical and mental violence from sexist beliefs given by the local community. While

perhaps the differentiation in the setting of these short stories—which is in the Eastern country like Arab—with the novel that the writer will study (which takes place in western country, New York) will influence the number of sexist attitudes and scale of the actions that can be found, the writer believes this article is dependable because it can help the writer to see sexism is not only can be done in action but also in tradition and culture which makes the whole point of sexism is a products of a patriarchal society becomes stronger.

The next article is from Alan W. France entitled “Misogyny and Appropriation in Wright’s *Native Son* (1988)”. This article finds that this novel written by male is struggling to appropriate women by reducing them to objects of male status conflict. The finding of this article notes that *Native Son* is the story of a black man’s rebellion against white male authority. However, in fighting racism as an issue in the novel to show his male character’s strength and development, Wright fails to recognize that he is actually treating his female character wrongly. He tends to portray black women as treacherous and traitorous and to present their suffering as. In the text, it can be found that he also reduces women to property, valuable only to the extent they serve as objects of conflicts. Women in *Native son* are objects of appropriation; they are at the same time desired as objects but contemptible in their weakness and passivity. This article is helpful for the writer as it highlights the concern of sexism and misogyny is less concerning for some people because it has been normalized for a long time that men’s problem should be prioritized upon women’s problem. The writer can use this as a

reference to argue that women's problem should be a matter of discussion as well in achieving a peaceful and equal life in society.

The sixth article is Larassati Ningsih and Delvi Wahyuni's article entitled "The Interpellation of Misogyny by Female Characters in Novel *Eileen* by Ottessa Moshfegh (2020)." This article finding shows that misogyny attitudes in the novel can be done by female characters as well which makes the interpellation of misogyny exist in the form of self-judgment, self-objectification, and negative attitude towards other female characters. This article uses feminist literary criticism in analyzing the women's issues in the novel. By using the concept of interpellation by Luis Althusser, this article finds that female characters can also be misogynistic. From reading this article, the writer gains another perspective to argue that misogyny is a product of a patriarchal society, it has been normalized by patriarchy until the point that the one who does not realize the damage it causes to women. This article is also helpful in clarifying the purpose of feminist literary work is not to criticize male character but to criticize patriarchy and its beliefs and authorities.

The seventh article entitled "Women-Hating: On Misogyny, Sexism and Hate Speech." Written by Louisa Richardson-Self (2018). This article contributes to literature by defining sexism and misogyny on its own terms and providing a more nuanced division of oppressive speech and hate speech. The finding of this research summarizes that sexism is characterized from the existence of a justificatory component that provides reasons that men are naturally superior to women and the existence of idealization of hierarchical distinction in support of patriarchal gender

order. On the other hand, misogyny is characterized by the existence of hostility toward women because they are perceived to subvert patriarchal norms. The writer believes this article can be used as a general foundation to separate sexism and misogyny as gender issues found in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. This article offers conceptual thinking that sexist ideology will tend to discriminate between men and women, whereas misogyny will typically differentiate between good men and bad ones and punish the latter. This article reasoned the writer's own choice to keep sexism and misogyny as two topics to be discussed in this research since they are intertwined matters.

1.4 Research Questions

This research is expected to answer the following questions:

- 1.4.1 What forms of sexism and misogyny does Taylor Jenkins Reid deliver as her female character struggles in her novel?
- 1.4.2 How does Taylor Jenkins Reid as a female author, show her rejection of sexism and misogyny as products of patriarchal society in her novel?

1.5 Scope of the Research

Taylor Jenkins Reid provides many issues in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, which obviously are worth to be discussed. The psychological issue, the economic issue, the historical issue, the gender issue and many more. However, this research will only focus on the intrinsic element of the novel, which is the female

character and the experience dealing with sexism and misogyny of said female character living in patriarchal society.

1.6 Objectives of the Research

This research aims to show the female character's struggle to fight against sexism and misogyny as a form of Reid's criticism of patriarchal society. The writer will determine how sexism and misogyny are done in the novel and discuss how harmful these attitudes are toward women. This research also will distinguish the role of Taylor Jenkins Reid as a female author in delivering her criticism against patriarchal norms in the novel.

