

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

The term “patriarchal hegemony” is used to describe the male domination that exists in the social, economic, and political structures of society. The hegemonic process refers to the mechanism by which the ruling class establishes its dominance and advances its interests in society through consenting and accepting other courses (Stoddart 201). It involves persuading the subordinate classes to embrace the ruling class's values, beliefs, and ideologies as universal and beneficial for all, even though they primarily serve their interests. Gramsci posited that the process occurs through various social institutions, including educational institutions, employment, and other organizations controlled by dominant societal figures (Gramsci 91). By bringing together consent and presenting their particular interests as universal, the ruling class can achieve power and maintain control over society's social, political, and economic spheres without overt coercion or force.

In this manner, a patriarchal hegemony is established by propagating myths about women, portraying them as irrational, complex, and opaque beings. In her book *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir posits that every man endeavors to find a woman whom he deems to be “the ideal,” one who can fulfill all of his needs (Tong 182). As a consequence, men perpetuate a myth that the ideal woman is always submissive to men, even if it means that she is willing to give up her life for the benefit of these men. The most dangerous consequence of disseminating

these myths about women through patriarchal hegemony is that women internalize the myth of the “ideal woman” as reality.

This patriarchal hegemony underpins several problematic social phenomena, including the social construction of gender roles. Within this framework, men are regarded as superior. They can control and determine the prevailing norms, while women are positioned as subordinates with limited access to equal resources and opportunities. The entrenchment of patriarchal hegemony extends beyond just the domestic sphere, penetrating various aspects of public life, including the world of art and culture. To challenge this systemic issue, various feminist movements throughout history have persistently fought for women’s equality and recognition of their existence as human beings (Munaris and Joko 300).

One of the feminist figures who significantly contributed to the development of feminism is Simone de Beauvoir. In her work *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir articulates the idea *on ne sait pas femme, on ledevient* (one is not born but rather becomes a woman) (Beauvoir 12). This thought of Beauvoir is subsequently called existential feminism due to the influence of the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. Beauvoir argues an antithesis against the essentialist that claims women are born feminine. She explains that there are no differences between men and women. Instead, she posits those societal conventions later shape women as “women” (Amin 85).

One of the aspects critiqued by Beauvoir in existential feminism is the marginalization of women as *the other* in a culture created by men. In the context

of existentialist feminism, Beauvoir argues that men are designated as *the self*, while women are categorized as *the other*. *The self* has absolute control and is positioned as the subject so that they can dominate. Meanwhile, as *the other* in the existence of *the self*, women are positioned as objects that men can control (Prameswari 2). This phenomenon is also reflected in literary works, where women are often relegated to subordinate roles.

Women, as traditionally depicted by male authors, are deemed incapable of accurately reflecting the authentic experiences of women (Lange 3). This phenomenon is attributed to men perceiving women as “blank pages.” Consequently, they attempt to fill this void according to their preferences, which often diverge from the authentic experiences of women and do not align with the reality of women’s lives (Gubar 187). The invalid portrayal renders the existence of women not fully recognized, akin to that of men. In literary works produced by male authors, women are often perceived merely as objects and do not have the accountability of themselves.

With the feminist movement, there has been a paradigm shift in literature where female authors are beginning to offer exclusive perspectives and narratives in depicting women. The emergence of female writers creates a space for women's voices to be translated into more accurate and authentic words. Showalter addresses this by introducing the term gynocriticism, which then focuses on criticizing literary works written by women (Mallick 115). Based on this, women are then placed as prominent subjects, overcoming the tendency to portray them as objects in the writings produced by men. It can be seen in various works of

notable female writers, such as Chopin in *The Awakening*, published in 1899. Through the lens of female authors, literature becomes a means for exploring women's experiences and identities. This transformation in literature enriches literary landscapes and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse realities of women.

One of the exemplifications of this transformation and rejection of patriarchal hegemony can be found in the works of American writer Taylor Jenkins Reid. Reid acquires recognition for her works that prominently feature feminist themes. The issues she explores through her writing are inextricably linked to women's career struggles, gender equality, the bonds of sisterhood, and other forms of repudiation of patriarchal dominance. Reid's female protagonists often defy traditional stereotypes of womanhood, representing a diversity of backgrounds, ages, races, and sexual orientations in an inclusive manner that aims to capture the varied experiences of women. A salient example is Reid's 2017 novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, which initially received modest attention upon publication but subsequently earned widespread popularity in 2021 after being included on the New York Times Best Seller list (Rahmani 4). *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* centers around the fictional Hollywood actress named Evelyn in the 1970s. It revolves around Evelyn's journey, especially concerning her seven marriages. Evelyn is portrayed as an intellectual woman capable of asserting her subjectivity within the patriarchal hegemony. Despite facing adverse conditions within that society, she emerges triumphant in countering the patriarchal hegemony and reclaiming complete control over her

existence. Reid skillfully depicts women as active agents capable of directing their lives by presenting the female character as a feminist figure capable of countering patriarchal hegemony.

Exploring Evelyn's character within the framework of feminist literary criticism offers a perspective to analyze how her experiences reflect and contribute to the ongoing feminist discourse. The novel becomes a medium through which the complexities of gender dynamics, societal expectations, and female empowerment are explored and critiqued. This research into *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* seeks to enhance the comprehensive understanding of how literature, particularly through feminist literary criticism, can challenge and reshape societal perceptions of gender roles and empower women to assert their agency within patriarchal structures.

Drawing upon the discussion above, the writer would like to analyze the underlying factors behind countering patriarchal hegemony by Evelyn Hugo, the protagonist of Taylor Jenkins Reid's novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. Moreover, it seeks to explain how Evelyn counters these oppressive patriarchal ideologies through the analytical framework of existentialist feminism theory articulated by Simone de Beauvoir.

1.2 Identification of Problems

In the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, Evelyn is portrayed as a character consistently confronted with patriarchal hegemony, such as marginalization and objectification. These problems extend throughout her life,

from her personal life to her professional career as a renowned actress in Hollywood. However, despite the difficulties she faces within the patriarchal hegemony, Evelyn continues to appear as a subject who is capable of countering these problems. Furthermore, she is depicted as an intelligent and empowered woman, enabling her to handle male dominance effectively and find ways to assert control, ultimately benefiting herself.

The explanation above reflects how Evelyn can fulfill her existence as a subject within a patriarchal society, allowing her to overcome the patriarchal hegemony directed toward her. The writer contends that this phenomenon is worthy of analysis, as despite being consistently confronted with male domination, Evelyn persistently represents an empowered woman and successfully counters the domination. By identifying and addressing these problems, the thesis aims to contribute to a more profound understanding of feminist ideas, especially existentialist feminism represented by Evelyn within the narrative of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* novel.

1.3 Review of Related Literature

Scholars have extensively researched existentialist feminism, a prominent topic within literary criticism and feminist theory. They have explored diverse genres, historical periods, and specific authors to identify and analyze instances of existentialist feminism in literature. The writer has diligently reviewed numerous relevant research papers on this subject to enhance the comprehension of how

existentialist feminism is represented in literature. The insights from these related literature sources will be further elaborated in the subsequent discussion.

The first relevant study is Rahmani's undergraduate thesis, published in 2023. This research aims to find forms of sexism and misogyny experienced by the female characters in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* novel by Taylor Jenkins Reid, and to examine Reid's influence as a female author from a gynocriticism perspective. The results of the research show that there are two forms of sexism found in the novel: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Moreover, there are also three forms of misogyny found in the novel such as objectifying women, male privilege, and gender-based violence. Besides, Reid, as a female author, draws lines from other male authors who use sexism to justify the mistreatment and discrimination of female characters as something natural and normal to be done in their writing. Reid's rejection of sexism and misogyny is delivered through the portrayal of her female character. This study is helpful for the writer as it discusses the same material object, the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Reid. The author of this study is focused on the sexism and misogyny found in the novel. Meanwhile, the writer highlights the underlying forces behind the countering of patriarchal hegemony found in the novel and how Evelyn counters it within existentialist feminism by Simone de Beauvoir.

The second article is Das' article published in 2023; this article uses the theory of Adriene Rich, Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence, in explaining the character Evelyn Hugo in the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid. The article shows that Evelyn tears the image of a

culturally accepted woman by preferring to make decisions according to herself, which she chooses to preserve her queer identity. According to Rich, heterosexuality is presumed to be the “sexual preference” of most women. Due to this, queer women generally tend to ignore their lesbian impulses, which they often consider a disease or a kind of abnormality in their personality. Evelyn Hugo broke away from this and kept striving for her love for Celia. This article allows the writer to see another perspective from the novel the writer would like to analyze.

The third relevant study is from Damayanti’s undergraduate thesis published in 2023. This research analyses the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid using the sociology of literature approach. This is because the novel represents social issues, such as discrimination based on race, class, and gender, which are scrutinized through feminist literary criticism. The result of this research revealed that Monique and Evelyn endured subjugation due to their racial background and gender. Monique was relegated to the place of work, while Evelyn was imperiled to the five faces of oppression stated by Irish Young. Their struggles are entwined with liberal feminism that voices shifting laws and establishments. The writer believes this study is dependable because it can help the writer to see Evelyn's struggle not only in terms of existentialist feminism but also in terms of oppression, which is portrayed through the five faces of oppression proposed by Irish Young.

The fourth relevant article is in Kusumandono’s article in 2022. This article explains the existentialist feminism theory proposed by Simone de

Beauvoir to identify gender discrimination in Lauren Schmidt Hissrich's *The Witcher* (2019). Moreover, this research addresses the gender discrimination suffered by the female main character, Yennefer, and her actions to rise from gender discrimination in film. The finding of this research shows that Yennefer is suffering from gender discrimination toward women. Still, in the time she realizes that she can rise from the gender discrimination she suffered, she decides to take her chance and free herself. Yennefer achieves three things to fulfill her existence: becoming intellectual, being herself, and actualizing herself with freedom. Since the writer's research looks into existentialist feminism, which offers some actions women must achieve in order to fulfill their existences, this article is quite helpful to be used to give a better understanding since both of the researches discuss the same topic and share the same theory of Simone de Beauvoir.

The fifth relevant study is an undergraduate thesis from Ratnaningsih in 2014. This research aims to discuss the idea of existentialist feminism represented in *Pengakuan Eks Parasit Lajang's* novel by Ayu Utami, which refers to the correlation between the development of the main awareness novel with the idea in mind existentialist feminism, the ambiguity of the shape, and concept of new thinking. The researcher employs the conceptual framework of existentialist feminism ideas proposed by Simone de Beauvoir, reflected by the seven aspects in the novel. These aspects encompass the relationship between subject and object, the existence of The Self and The Other in the female body, the concept of virginity, marriage, the position of women within Catholicism, and identity formation. This research found that women have the right to set their values, dig

their awareness, and develop new forms of expression related to their values and awareness. The writer finds this article dependable because it can help the writer see how the concept of existentialist feminism by Simone de Beauvoir applied to a fictional character and how this research looks into the same issue, existentialist feminism by Simone de Beauvoir.

The sixth related literature was taken from an undergraduate thesis by Prasetyawan in 2016. This thesis is carried out by using existential feminism theory, patriarchal concepts, and film studies to analyze the representation of existential feminism by Arya Stark in the television series *Game of Thrones*. The researcher argues that Arya Stark's representation of existential feminism is caused by patriarchal culture, which impacts her daily life as a noblewoman. Existentialist feminism representation is shown by Arya in her resistance to social construction and also in her struggle against all forms of objectification toward her, which can alienate her existence. The researcher found seven ways in which Arya Stark represents existentialist feminism there are rejection of tradition, free choice, resistance to stereotypes, the dichotomy of sex and gender, resistance to objectification, bad faith, and authentic life choice. This research allows the writer to see how existentialist feminism is represented by a female character in movies and in what forms she means.

The next relevant study is an article from Syam et al. in 2021. This study aims to describe the existence of women and the strategies of female characters in showing their existence in the novel *Canting* by Arswendo Atmowiloto. This research is conducted by utilizing Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism.

This research shows that to fulfill her existence, Ibu Bei, a female main character in the novel, uses four strategies based on existentialist feminism; there are works as a batik laborer, intellectuals with broad insight who work to make money, and does not want to be seen as weak. This article aligns with the writer's article, which discusses the existentialist feminism reflected by female characters in the novel. This study is also helpful in aligning the strategies that can be performed by women in order to fulfill their existence.

The last relevant study is an article by Handayani that examines the female subjectivity within the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf. Handayani investigates how the main female character contends with and responds to the patriarchal system that constrains her. Handayani's findings highlight two main points; firstly, the patriarchal system, primarily enforced by the main character's family, is the root cause of her subjectivity issues. Secondly, the various ways the main character responds to this patriarchy include resistance and negotiation. These responses lead to a complex interplay of support and challenges from those around her, influenced by the socio-cultural context of America, which shapes her expressions of subjectivity. This article is relevant to my research as it parallels the exploration of feminism spirit in literary works. Both studies analyze how female characters navigate and respond to patriarchal structures to assert their subjectivity. Handayani's work helps understand the broader socio-cultural dynamics that influence female agency and resistance, enriching the analysis of similar themes in Reid's novel.

1.4 Research Question

Based on the background above of the study, the writer aims to focus the study to answer the following questions.

1. What are the underlying factors behind countering patriarchal hegemony in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*?
2. How does Reid, as a female author, counter patriarchal hegemony within the narrative of Evelyn Hugo's character in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*?

1.5 Scope of the Research

In *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, Taylor Jenkins Reid introduces a complex range of themes that invite thorough examination, encompassing psychological, historical, sexual orientation, and gender-related dimensions. Notwithstanding this expansive thematic landscape, the present research attempts to examine the underlying forces behind countering patriarchal hegemony in the novel and outline the strategy used by Reid in countering the patriarchal hegemony through her female main character, Evelyn, in the novel. This involves thoroughly exploring Evelyn's experiences as she deals with the patriarchal hegemony in the novel. The circumstances then lead her to counter the patriarchal hegemony, which aims to fulfill her existence or show her agency. This phenomenon is analyzed using existentialist feminism strategies proposed by Simone de Beauvoir.

1.6 Research Objectives

Following the problems of the study above, the objective of the study aims to explain the forces behind countering patriarchal hegemony in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. Furthermore, this study also aims to explain how Reid, as a female author, depicts the character Evelyn Hugo in countering patriarchal hegemony and shows her subjectivity in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*.

