

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

One of the famous and common belief that lives among us is the idea that men are more privileged than women. This idea is called patriarchy. Men are considered to have more privileges than women because of the traditional gender roles. In the traditional gender roles, women are seen as weak, emotional and submissive individuals while on the other hand, men are seen as strong, rational, and protective individuals.

This patriarchy belief leads to the phenomenon where men are thinking that they are more 'important' than women. They often think that they could easily use and control women as they wanted to. Thus, this illustration comes to the conclusion that women are seen as objects by their opposite gender who think themselves as the superior one. This phenomenon is known as the objectification (Omvedt 1986).

Objectification happens to almost all women in the world. Women objectification commonly happens in some sexual aspects like; body shaming, catcalling (whistling when women are passing by), gazing, pornography and even rape. The examples included show that women are often seen as objects used by men to fulfill their sexual desires.

There are numerous crimes that involves women as victims in daily basis. Almost all of the crimes are related to the objectification and sexual assault against

women. This then encourages feminists to take action. Feminism movement that happens currently always have the same purpose: eliminating patriarchy culture and achieving gender equality. Challenge faced by feminism is to change the world to be more responsive towards women. Instead of putting women's position under men, placing theirs to men will be more relevant. If the feminism movement could pass this, women will no longer be seen as objects in the following decades (Offen 1988).

Born as a woman in this world is somehow a blessing and a curse at the same time. As we know, women are seen as the second sex in the last thousand years. Women have been treated differently compared to men for a very long time. This phenomenon has started to change in the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century when women have started to raise their voice in the first wave of feminism. They finally got the chance to vote on the political events and officially have the 'voice' to build the same environment as men. However, after the first wave of feminism, women's struggle is not over yet. They have been going through the second wave of feminism and the third wave feminism. In fact, women are still struggling nowadays in order to fight for their rights, to have the same individual rights as human beings (Offen 1988).

This study uses *Milk and Honey*, a poem collection's book written by a women writer named Rupi Kaur. In this book, Rupi Kaur already stated that this book is about love, loss, trauma, abuse, healing and femininity. *Milk and Honey* was published in 2014. It was Rupi Kaur's first book. Not long after its publication, *Milk and Honey* became New York Times bestseller for 25 weeks. *Milk and Honey* is a book of poems collection about some developing issues regarding women.

Divided into four chapters, each chapter brings different purpose to the readers (Kaur, *Milk and Honey* 2014).

This book has already become popular among young teenagers. They love this book because of the simple and easy dictions Rupi Kaur used in the poem. Each poem only contains 4 to approximately 20 lines. As Rupi Kaur stated before, every poem explained a story we did not know. That is what probably makes *Milk and Honey* famous. Rupi Kaur wrote more than two hundred poems that describe how women are struggling in the patriarchal culture. Each of the poem could bring different interpretation to the reader, depending on the content. Rupi Kaur also won Goodreads Choice Award for Best Poem. There are actually a lot of women issues on the book, such as male gaze, femme fatale, girl power, gender representation, and others. Nevertheless, the main focus of this study is the analysis on women objectification.

Objectification is where men put women as objects, not as appropriate human beings. Not only for sexual desire, men sometimes see women as less important individuals compared to them. The issue of objectification itself is more focused on women as victims rather than men as victims. This conclusion comes from the explanation of the patriarchal society. Most of people in the world are still living in the patriarchal society. In fact, according to National Sexual Assault Hotline, 9 out of every 10 victims of rape are women. But still, even though most of the objectification relate to the sexual issue, sometimes we could see how women are pictured as mere symbols. Women are sometimes referred to complementary. For example, very good looking and pretty women are seen as the trophy for

wealthy men. When they could get such women to be married or in relationship with, they will brag in front of any other men as if they are winning something in life. Women's existence is regarded as completion to men. The purpose of a woman growing up is to be a perfect wife or mother to a man, not to be a perfect individual being for themselves. So, it will be very difficult to see women as individual subjects.

Therefore, until right now there are still a lot of stereotypes that underestimate women. These stereotypes are usually in forms such as 'women should not go to a higher education', 'women should know how to cook properly because they belong to the kitchen', 'women should stay at home and should not go to work, it is the husband's job', 'a wife must always please the husband's sexual desire any time' and even 'a perfect woman is someone who could give birth to a lot of children.' Surprisingly, those kinds of stereotype are still growing strong among people in patriarchal society (Eagly 1989).

This study examines objectification issue towards women because almost all women in the world are already experienced being objectified. Despite their age, almost all women who are still young, middle age, or even older are ever treated as objects. This study explains what it feels like to be objectified from the perspective of women. Because not all of the poems in the book are explaining about objectification, this study only uses some of the poems. The voice of the objectification victims will be described from the poems in the *Milk and Honey*. Rupi Kaur is suitable to be the voice of women because she was born in a country where the patriarchy belief is still very strong.

In examining this study, the writer uses theory of objectification presented in a journal article titled “*Objectification*” written by Martha C. Nussbaum (1995) and a book titled “*Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification*” written by Rae Langton (2009). Combining from these two books, the writer focuses on the core notion on objectification theory, ten features to describe a person treated as an object. This theory will be used in this study to examine the phenomenon of objectification towards women in Rupi Kaur’s *Milk and Honey*.

There is still no formal academic study using *Milk and Honey* as the object in any aspects, but there are a lot of related studies that examined women objectification in the perspective of feminism in literature. Different from other studies, this study is using Martha C. Nussbaum and Rae Langton theory on the poems rather than on novels. The other studies that have been conducted regarding women objectification issue are mostly using another theory and using novels as their object rather than poem. Several examples of the studies that are related to this study are *A Crippled and Erotic: Gender and Disability in James Joyce’s “Nausicca”* (2011), *The Objectification of Women in Cane* (2013), *Masculine Sexuality and the Objectification of Women in Steinbeck’s Perspective* (2004) and *The Objectification of Teenage Girls in Mary Hooper’s Fallen Grace* (2018). All of the studies mentioned used the same object, they used novel as the object. This study is different from the other studies mentioned since this study used poems as the source of the data. Most of the findings in the related studies show that not every woman that is being objectified could fight back the objectification.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the explanation in the background of the study above, there are some interesting problems that are formulated as follows:

1. How is the objectification towards women depicted in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*?
2. How do the women react in response to the objectification?

## 1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems, the analysis of this study aims to:

1. To explain and analyze how women objectification is depicted in the selected poems on *Milk and Honey*.
2. To examine how women in the selected poem on *Milk and Honey* react in response to objectification.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

The issue of Objectification is something that almost every girl experienced. Almost every woman throughout the whole world ever witnessed or experienced being objectified by another human, especially men. Objectification issue is something we suffer everyday but rarely people speak up about this issue (Omvedt 1986). There are only a few people who talk about objectification because most of people do not take this issue seriously. This research is expected to give more awareness to lot of people and also give some new insight to people who are interested in the same study field by giving a lot of examples on how women is being objectified as portrayed in the book. This study will also analyze how women

react to the objectification itself. The insight from this research is especially for students in the field of literature in English Department of Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga. There are actually a lot of previous studies that already focused on objectification issue and using objectification theory. What makes this research different with the others is that this research will use poem as the object. The other research usually identifies novel or short story as the object. By doing this research, the writer also expected to expand more on the study field of the objectification.

### **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

**Feminism:** The belief of the equality in sexes on all of aspect in life like political, economic and social (Burkett 2019)

**Objectification:** A situation where someone treat a person as an object which in fact they are not and object at all, but a human being (Nussbaum 1995, 257)

**Poetry:** Any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and is meant to tell a story or express any kind of emotion and ideas or state a being (Ollila 2006)

**Girl Power:** Girl Power can be understood as a response to longstanding feminist critiques of feminine gender roles that define femininity as a patriarchal marker of female powerlessness and oppression – in effect, second wave feminists were almost unanimous in their

dismissal of femininity as an artificial, man-made product (Genz and  
Brabon 2009:77)