

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The society creates two categories of human based on the sex appearance: male and female. They are not only differentiated based on their sexual appearance but also based on their roles in the society or it can be called as gender role. In this case, gender is generated by the influence of social environment. The formation of gender results in two different kinds of characters, which are masculine and feminine. The society defines man with male appearances in masculine way, such as being strong and tough, while man with female appearances is defined with feminine characters, such as tender and passive that is able to take care of the family.

Those kinds of situation are pictured in the patriarchal society that positions man higher than woman. The system that is believed by the patriarchal society, has caused imbalances between man and woman. It can be understood from *Critical Theory Today* that patriarchy is thus, by definition, *sexist*, which means it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men (Tyson, 86). Patriarchal society always straighten up about what women can and cannot do where this is controlled by the power of man. Unconsciously, patriarchal society assumes that if women accept their traditional gender role and obey the patriarchal rules, then they will be recognized as a 'good girl', while if they do not, then they

will be recognized a 'bad girl' (Tyson, 89). According to this statement, there is a strict rule about what a man and woman can and cannot do in the public based on the society's perspective. Patriarchal society imposes the positions of women that always depend on man. according to this system, woman cannot stand on their own foot because they always need permission from man and must obey what man said. These conditions make many women in the world want to break the rule of patriarchy. Women want to stand on their own foot, not just depend on men. The struggle of women to get equality becomes interesting to be discussed as they struggle and face many difficulties to get equality.

In patriarchal society, there is a common term that describes the character of man and woman contrastly/oppositely which is Traditional Gender Role. *Traditional gender roles* cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. (Tyson, 85). It can be said that women are always depicted as emotional, weak, and submissive. Women cannot be in the first place but always sit on the second place. The power of men over women that showed in the family is when the husband becomes the decision maker. Husband becomes the decision maker and has the biggest authority because he is constructed as the head of the family and he is the one who has responsibility to fulfill the families finance. Traditional gender role excludes women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (in the family as well as in politics, academia, and the corporate world (Tyson, 85).

Traditional gender role in the common society causes male dominance that can make female become powerlessness one. The condition causes gender inequality between men and women. For the example, in Elementary School's book, about the portrayal of "Father go to the office for work, and Mother go to the market to buy a household needed". From the example it can be seen that men are always able to do activity on public space and become the dominance one, but women must stay at home and become the powerless at the public space. Even women can go to public space, they cannot do the equal things like men do. As the example, when woman work as secretary which the positions is lower than man's job as supervisor or others.

The writer of this study chooses Traditional Gender Role as the issue to be analyzed in a novel titled *Our Only May Amelia* by Jennifer L. Holm published by Harper Collins in 2001. Jennifer L. Holm has already written many children literatures such as *Penny from Heaven*, *Trouble with May Amelia*, and *Our Only May Amelia*. Among her books, *Our Only May Amelia* will become the object of this study. *Our Only May Amelia* is one on many books that got Newberry Honor Book award in 1999. This novel also won other awards, such as: The Parents' Choice Silver Award, the Publishers Weekly Best of 1999 Book, and also the Publishers Weekly Flying Start (Harper Collins Teaching Guide).

Jennifer L. Holm was born in California in 1968. She has four older brothers and no sisters, just like her character May Amelia in *Our Only May Amelia*. Holm's really like to do everything like what the brothers do like softball,

kickball, climbing trees, spitting contest, swimming in the creek, etc. Those of activities make Holm looks like a boy and less a girl. Her childhood that surrounding by a pack of brothers give an inspiration to her to write novel entitled *Our Only May Amelia*. Holms' writing career began when she was a student at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania studying international relations. In this college she attends a class in writing short stories, because of her interest on writing (Jacketflap).

The story of this novel is about a twelve-year-old girl named May Amelia who wants to achieve equality upon her brother in doing job and activities. May Amelia is the only girl in her family even in her village, Nasel River. May Amelia grows up like a boy because she does not have a sister or a friend with the same sex to play with. She just plays with her brothers. Besides playing with her brother, as a girl, May Amelia is treated that she must not forget about her biological essentialism that she is a girl. Jalmer, May Amelia's father, never allows her to do something like what the boys do. Jalmer only asks May Amelia to stay at home and to help her mother preparing everything for the family. He wants May Amelia to be a proper young lady. The depiction of May Amelia shows that there is inequality in treating boy and girl. In other words, her parents apply Traditional Gender Role in raising children.

In this study, the writer assumes that the object of this study carries the appropriate issue that is related to the first wave feminism which is equality. Moreover, the first wave feminism is in the late eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries, such as Mary Wollstonecraft who argues in her essay entitled *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* published on 1792 said that women should be included in the masculine project. Wollstonecraft's aim was for women to be given an access to education, to the Liberal model of knowledge and rationality and to enter public life. She desires that women can attain what men can attain in terms of opportunities and access to public activities. Therefore, this study will discuss about the negotiation of May Amelia to facing patriarchal society.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

How are male's dominance and female's powerlessness depicted in May Amelia's life in Holms' *Our Only May Amelia*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

To reveal male's dominance and female's powerlessness that depict in May Amelia's life in Holms' *Our Only May Amelia*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The writer wants to show the portrayal of feminism that occurred in children literature. The object of this study in which a novel entitled *Our Only May Amelia* by Jennifer L. Holm published on 1999, whereas the background of the story itself is around 1899. The writer of this study see that in children literature, feminism is not only seen as the oppression on woman or woman

struggle but it also seen as the way children are raised and treated according to the traditional gender roles by the parents. The writer hopes that this study will affect the society's point of view on traditional gender role that happen in this era which is still the same or not.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

In analyzing Jennifer L. Holm's *Our Only May Amelia*, the writer focuses on the main character of this novel. The main character is May Amelia, 12 years old that has 7 older brothers which makes her realize about the inequalities between men and women. The writer give attention on May Amelia's behavior, manner, and the way she dressed up. This study also presents May Amelia's family as the supporting element in seeing the family environment as the closest environment and the society that attempts to make May Amelia become a proper lady, not the opposites.

1.6 Theoretical Background

Feminist Literary Criticism is one of many ways in criticizing literary works. It is like an umbrella that consist many different theories. However, feminist literary criticism concerns mainly about the issue among women. As stated in Bressler that "feminist criticism is an umbrella term for a variety of approaches of culture and literature that are of particular interest of women" (167). Particularly, Feminist Literary Criticism mostly criticizes some issue about

women which show that women as the powerless one use to be oppressed by men as the dominant one. Since the writer attempts to analyze the issue within the main character, May Amalie, then the writer expects that feminist literary criticism is able to use. However, the writer does not only pay attention toward the gender of main character only but also about the setting within the novel that happen during nineteenth century which also as the same with the second wave of feminism.

In the first wave of feminism, there are several issue that are about to happen toward women namely patriarchy, traditional gender role and gender equality. Patriarchy is about a value creating in society which claimed than men is more superior to women. In this patriarchy system, men were classified as decision maker. In the family, a man is Father that becomes the biggest decision maker. The writer uses the definition of patriarchy with the idea by Kate Millett. As well as explained in Bressler, Millet believed that the power center of our culture is located in male dominance and by doing so, women are forced to be subordinated one, in which this is also called as patriarchy system (173). This patriarchy system surely is not able to be separated with the issue of traditional gender role. In traditional gender role, there is distinctive value between men and women that each of them must follow different quality. As well as Millet defines that society tends to give a norm that boys should be aggressive, self-assertive, and domineering but girls just should be passive, meek and humble (173). This kind of quality makes men are positioned higher than women. These kind of things absolutely show that there is no equality between men and women. It leads

toward gender equality issue. Wollstonecraft as explained in Beasley argued that to attain gender equality, women should be given an access toward education and public life in which to gain knowledge and rationality as the same with men's access. (31).

According to the explanation above, the writer believes that the notion of patriarchy, traditional gender role and gender equality is applicable to analyze the novel. However, the writer uses Wollstonecraft's idea about gender equality as the main issue because it mainly happens toward May Amalie both in family and social life. Hence, the writer attempts to collaborate patriarchy and traditional gender role to raise gender equality issue. These issues are definitely reveal the picture of male's dominance and female's powerlessness

1.7 Method of the Study

In doing this study, the writer uses qualitative research method. Qualitative research is based on an interpretive epistemology, means that knowledge is generated and shaped through interaction between those who involved in the research process.

In doing qualitative research, the writer needs any sources from online articles, books, and other sources. The primary source of this study is taken from the novel of Jennifer L. Holm entitled *Our Only May Amelia* that becomes the object of this study. Besides the primary source, there is also secondary source that serves as a supporting element in this study. The secondary source is derived from the book

that discusses the Feminism theory such as *Feminist Thought: a Comprehensive Introduction* by Rosemarie Tong, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft, and other reliable books. Moreover, the writer also collects the supporting data from journals, online article from the reliable sources.

After deciding the primary and secondary sources, the writer also uses the close reading method towards these two sources. The writer uses close reading to find out the specific examples to validate the writer's interpretation that support the reading of literature (Tyson, 135). Close reading is expected to facilitate the writer in grasping deeper understanding about the object and the theory. The following step after doing the close reading is the analysis of the novel and the supporting books that is functioned in finding out the similarity between these two sources, so it can result in the good analysis of this study.

After doing the analysis, the writer creates the conclusion that becomes the end result of this study. The last step in this study is to record the sources that are used as the primary and secondary sources in this study in the form of references.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Gender Construction	:	A social and cultural construction of a gender which representing a complex of given signs and features of males and female behavior, lifestyle, thought, logics, norms, preferences, life aspirations, etc.
First wave feminism	:	Organized feminist activity which evolved in Britain and the USA in the second half of the 19 th century.

- Patriarchy : A type of relations in society based on domination of men and a subordinate and minor position of women; general structure in which men have power over women; a society consist of male-dominated power structure throughout organized society and in individual relationship.
- Male's dominance : Male dominance is not inherent in human relations but is a solution to various kinds of cultural strain. Those who are thought to embody, be in touch with, or control to creative forces of nature are perceived as powerful.
- Female's powerlessness : Women may have the ability to control or influence the behavior of younger people, but they are less likely to have the ability to make decisions affecting themselves or the household as a whole.