

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Feminist studies have been conducted to gain equal treatment for women and men by criticizing the patriarchal society. The system of patriarchy valued men and put the opposite gender, women, in a disadvantageous place (Tyson 2015, 81). It has caused an imbalance. Women usually experience it because patriarchal values are beneficial for men. Patriarchy governs the aspects of life from the most basic. Gender is the main reason for the patriarchal society to divide things when it comes to women and men. For the patriarchal society, gender was no different when compared to sex (Tyson 2015, 98). The way society perceives gender leads to certain expectations of men and women. In contrast to sex which is natural, gender was a concept that was more related to culture than biological one (Stoller 2020, 9).

One of the gender issues is the determination of masculinity and femininity. In the 1980s, masculinity research focused on men because it was related to the assumption that masculinity was natural or responded to the male sex role, which was considered a fixed, unchanging, and normative structure (Reeser 2015, 13). In a patriarchal society, masculinity is men's attributes that show strength and domination. Meanwhile, femininity is a women's attribute that indicates gentleness. The qualities of masculinity and femininity could be indicated through both personality and behavior (Spence 1984, 16). Men do manly activities and women

act femininely is considered normal and natural. People will find it strange if someone does not behave by following patriarchal perception regarding gender itself because society believes that the roles of men and women are strictly divided. For a patriarchal society, women cannot be strong or dominant, and men cannot be gentle because those roles cannot be exchanged. Patriarchal society values men's dominance since masculinity is considered more superior than femininity. Those who were not masculine enough would be looked down upon by society (Spence and Buckner 1995, 106). Masculinity has brought privilege into society. Patriarchy emphasized biological differences to ensure that men were always in charge because they are believed to possess masculine attributes (Sultana 2010, 3). Its assumption disadvantages women who are believed to have natural femininity in them and causes them to experience subordination. Women's subordination was an inferior position that caused women to be powerless in society (Sultana 2010, 7). Due to women's subordination, women do not have freedom and control over themselves. In society, women were assumed to be the inessential ones, and it caused them to be labeled as *the Other* (de Beauvoir 2011, 26). It also makes women lose their rights to be involved in private and public matters.

In contrast to society, Judith Butler has challenged how society perceives gender through a new perception of gender. According to Butler (1999, 33), gender revealed itself to be performative, creating the identity it claims to be. It supports the statement that gender is a mere construct and has nothing to do with biological differences. Gender is more connected with behavior. Butler also added no identity behind a gender (1999, 33). From the statement before, it does not support society's

perception of masculinity and femininity. Physical appearance cannot decide the masculinity or femininity of someone since gender is separated from sex. To form a certain identity, a person needs to perform their gender. It proves that women can become masculine and men also can be feminine. Women can be masculine since masculinity is not exclusively associated with men. Sex cannot be the determination for it because gender could be constructed through the repetition of behavior (Butler 1999, 43-44). Butler supports this study by providing a representation of masculinity in a person through the perception that gender is performative. Women can be masculine even though they do not have male physical characteristics as long as they can demonstrate repeated behavior that supports the identity they want to be. In this case, the masculinity of the female character is something natural since gender can be determined through masculine performances.

This new perspective of masculinity and femininity is portrayed in *Sherwood* novel that Meagan Spooner writes. The novel was published in 2019. Meagan Spooner is the co-author of *These Broken Stars*, which won the Aurealis Award for Best Young Adult Novel. It is a feminist retelling of Robin Hood, where the main character is Marian. The novel begins with the death of Robin of Locksley and how his fiancée, Marian, tries to rescue Will. In this novel, Marian initially plays Robin Hood by disguising herself to help the poor people in Nottingham and fight the Sheriff's subordinates. Marian is considered a masculine character even when she does not disguise herself as Robin Hood. Marian is one of the examples that women can have masculinity in themselves and have the same opportunity as men by challenging women's subordination.

However, the ambiguity is still found in Marian's masculine role as Robin Hood in the novel. Although she can prove that women can naturally possess masculinity, at the same time, the novel shows that she cannot express her masculine side freely in public. It is considered the ambiguity because she cannot reveal her actual color as a masculine female in front of the public. It is supported by the societal portrayal in the novel. *Sherwood* novel provides the portrayal of social class in England, such as nobility, which still holds strong culture and gender perception. The social class has affected Marian as a noblewoman in taking an action. It thinks that masculinity is not suitable behavior for a woman, especially a noblewoman. Masculine practices might change based on the performer (age, social status, ethnicity), the audience, and the circumstance (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280). Marian's nobility has restricted her to do masculine performances due to the societal practices in the novel. However, Marian is encouraged by her status as a noble so that she dissembles as a male as a form of negotiation so that she can be involved in society.

The issues in *Sherwood* novel are interesting to be discussed because it gives a new representation of women through masculinity while simultaneously confirming the patriarchal system through the ambiguity of Marian's masculinity when she disguises herself as a male Robin Hood. Due to its fluidity, women and men have both masculinity and femininity in themselves. They can adopt specific attributes or roles in a situation requiring certain sides, whether masculinity or femininity. Thus, it is natural for women to demonstrate masculinity and be considered masculine. Unfortunately, it is also reflected in our lives that even many

women show their masculine side nowadays, but some women cannot express it freely because some people are stuck with patriarchal perceptions. It is realistically known that one cannot eliminate what is in society. However, a positive change in gender perspective can also occur on a small scale involving ourselves and those closest to us who can accept the change. Not everyone resists the new perception of gender. Men, who accept the change, are considered allies, not an obstacle (Cornwall 1997, 12). *Sherwood* novel also supports it by revealing male characters who are not against Marian's masculinity. It shows that they, who have a close relationship with Marian, have embraced the change. They think that Marian's masculinity is something natural. One of them is Marian's father.

A study on the same object, *Sherwood* novel, is limited. However, there is a previous review of *Sherwood* novel that Natalie Berglind conducted. Berglind (2019) found out about the feeling of loss due to death, an ideal way of helping, and the confusing identity of the real Robin Hood in the novel. A previous short story of Robin Hood was published by *Walt Disney* in 1977. In the *Disney's* short story version, Robin Hood is portrayed to be a male character and Maid Marian is depicted as an object and supports the traditional gender perception. Meanwhile, *Sherwood* novel gives a shifting portrayal of Marian while conforming the patriarchal gender perception. Hence, this study will only focus on the masculinity of Marian as the female main character in *Sherwood* novel through her behaviors and traits. The study also discusses the ambiguity that is presented in Marian's masculinity as Robin Hood while challenging women's subordination. In this study, the writer finds that some male characters close to Marian do not obstruct her even

though she is more dominant than them. In order to give detailed findings, some male characters will be analyzed to know how they perceive Marian's masculinity. Men were classified as obstacles in the previous feminist fields (Cornwall 1997, 10). It is because the domination of men rules society. That is why, this study also wants to provide an equal and positive side for both men and women through the way male characters perceive Marian's masculinity.

In order to help the analysis, the writer uses the gender performativity theory by Judith Butler (1999) as the leading theory. Gender performativity theory is used to analyze Marian's masculinity as the female main character in *Sherwood* novel. For Butler, gender is not sure, and it goes the same with a person's masculinity. The theory is considered suitable because Marian demonstrates her masculinity through her behavior which will form masculine traits. Also, Gender performativity theory helps to support that gender is a social construct through Marian's masculinity. In this study, the qualitative method analyzes Marian's issues in society. In order to support the analysis, the feminism approach is used to analyze the ambiguity in Marian's masculinity as Robin Hood while challenging women's subordination and the way some male characters perceive Marian's masculinity.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of the study above, these are the statements of the problems that can be analyzed in the study:

1. How does Meagan Spooner's *Sherwood* portray the masculinity of Marian as a female main character?

2. How does *Sherwood* novel portray the ambiguity in Marian's masculinity as Robin Hood while challenging women's subordination?
3. How do the male characters perceive Marian's masculinity in Meagan Spooner's *Sherwood*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the statements of the problem above, these are the objective of the study:

1. To analyze the masculinity of Marian as a female main character through her behavior and traits as shown in *Sherwood* novel.
2. To reveal the ambiguity in Marian's masculinity as Robin Hood while challenging women's subordination as it is portrayed in Meagan Spooner's *Sherwood*.
3. To show how male characters perceive Marian's masculinity in Meagan Spooner's *Sherwood*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is done in order to be able to share useful knowledge regarding the concept of gender. The study wants to deliver that gender is just a social construction and not related to the patriarchal assumption of masculinity and femininity so that it understands that women can also have their masculine side. For the writer, the study helps to encourage the writer to have critical thinking about the issues in literary works such as a novel that has still represented the society

nowadays. Importantly, the writer conducts the study to provide insight to the readers that both men and women have the same opportunity in every aspect. The study wants to show the readers a new perspective about the concept of gender that is possible for women to possess masculinity so that the readers can also contribute to challenging patriarchal assumptions. Therefore, the writer hopes that this study can be a useful source for other researchers and literature students at Airlangga University who are interested in researching gender studies.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

Ambiguity	: It could be considered as a lack of certainty of something which could not be defined (White and Perfors 2022, 1).
Gender	: Cultural construction that includes masculinity and femininity (Tyson 2015, 82).
Masculinity	: It was a set of action, languages, and practices which were frequently related with men and culturally understood as not feminine in certain culture and organizations (Itulua-Abumere 2013, 42).
Women's Subordination	: The deprivation of women's rights because patriarchy had limited the freedom, which opposes women's autonomy over their bodies and property (Sultana 2010, 7).