

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents some subchapters such as background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Poetry, one of the most expressive forms of literature, is characterised by its refined language, expression and powerful emotions. In addition to its aesthetic purpose, poetry has long been used as a tool to convey ideological resistance, social realities and personal experiences. Poets can convey complex human conditions that are often silenced or ignored in everyday discourse by using metaphors, symbolism, and rhythm. Poetry often becomes a place for marginalized voices to speak and assert their existence. As Mary Oliver said in her book, *A Poetry Handbook* (1994), poems must, of course, be written in emotional freedom. Moreover, poems are not language but the content of the language (Oliver, 1994).

Poetry often discusses the condition of women in patriarchal societies. In literary works, women are often faced with issues of inequality, violence, and role restrictions, both in the private and public spheres. Women are depicted in many poems as individuals who have rights or authority over themselves, as well as individuals whose identities are shaped and limited by social standards. This representation raises important questions about how female characters are created in literature and whether they are portrayed as active subjects or passive objects in the story.

Female characters in literary works are closely related to how society defines femininity. While men are associated with authority, truth, and freedom, women are often associated with domesticity, obedience, emotional dependence, and silence. Such characterizations reinforce unequal power relations and make

women feel that it is normal to be in a marginalized position. As a result, women's voices, experiences and struggles are often ignored or overlooked, both in literature and in real life. In this modern life, the issue of gender inequality is still a real problem faced by women in all parts of the world. Although women now have easy access to education, work and public space, they are still often treated unequally compared to men. In many cultures, especially in Asia, women are still often placed in a limited position when viewed through traditional values (Rohmawati & Pandin, 2021).

One of the most influential figures in feminist thought is Simone de Beauvoir, a French philosopher. Beauvoir explained in her work entitled 'The Second Sex' (1949) that women have always been considered as 'The Other' for centuries. Men are considered the center or the main measure, while women are considered the second or different part (Beauvoir, 1949). Because women are limited by the social roles that have been established by the patriarchal system, this view makes it difficult for them to be free individuals. According to Beauvoir, the way for women to be truly free from these constraints is for a woman to see herself as an independent individual, not just as a wife, daughter, or mother, and to have the courage to create her own meaning in life (Beauvoir, 1949)

The discussion of "women" here refers to everyone who is considered The Second Sex or The Other by society, adopting Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical perspective. The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of how women are portrayed as 'The Other' in poetry and how women's experiences of oppression, silencing, and struggle are depicted through the language of poetry.

According to Beauvoir, the concept of "Otherness" is the basis of the social mechanisms that perpetuate this oppression. Fundamentally, "Otherness" is an existential category that refers to a condition that is different from and secondary to the dominant norm. According to Beauvoir, society generally places men as Subjects, that is, the Essential, Absolute, and center of human existence (Beauvoir, 1949). On the other hand, women are described as the Other, that is, the Incidental

and Inessential. This status has profound consequences: women's existence is defined solely as "not male." According to Woolf, she said that women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size (Woolf, 1929).

In the world of literature, many women writers, especially in poetry, have voiced their struggles against oppression and the silencing of their voices. Through poetry, they are able to turn silence into voice, and suffering into strength. One such poet is Maya Anthony. In her poems such as 'Unseen Chain,' 'Two Scales,' 'Silent Voices,' 'The Weight of Words,' and 'The Unwritten Future' Maya describes how women are often silenced, restrained by social expectations, and blocked by invisible 'glass walls' in their lives.

Maya's works reflect women's struggle to find their voice and identity in a patriarchal world that ignores their existence. This research has the main objective of understanding how the struggle and silencing of women's voices are depicted in Maya Anthony's poetry. This is done by utilising Simone de Beauvoir's theory of existentialist-feminism.

Previous studies discuss Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist-feminism theory and its relationship with women's existence, for example the first study entitled 'Analyzing Simone de Beauvoir's Existential Feminism Perspective and Its Relevance Towards Indonesian Women's Existence In The Public Sphere of 21st Century' (2021), which examines the existence of Indonesian women in the public sphere. The second research entitled 'Women Oppression in Asian Women Poetry: A Feminist Analysis On Simone de Beauvoir's Perspective of "Otherness"' (2022), which analyses Asian women's poetry through Beauvoir's concept of 'Otherness'.

The third research, entitled 'Beauvoir's Concept of Women As The "Other" In Marriage In "The Intrusion"' (2025), which analyses how Beauvoir's concept of 'The Other' reflects the lives of female characters in marriage who are isolated, deprived of freedom and powerless. Fourth research, entitled 'Power and Change in Adrienne Rich's Poetry, or Toward a Female Alternative Vision of Power' (2022) discusses the concept of power in Adrienne Rich's poetry and how the poet

develops her perspective on alternative, feminist-based power. And last research, entitled 'The Female Voice and Sexual Autonomy: A Gendered Reading of Kamala Das's Confessional Poetry' (2025) this study specifically focuses on women's voices, autonomy, and struggles against patriarchal construction of femininity and sexuality. This study is relevant because it locates women's voices as sites of resistance and self-realisation to dismantle the imposed order of otherness.

Feminist literary studies have extensively discussed the oppression and representation of women using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. Most previous research has focused on fictional prose, marriage narratives, or poetry from specific cultural contexts, particularly Asian literature. Current research often analyses the oppression of women as a whole without thoroughly examining how the concept of Liyan is articulated through poetic language and poetry. In addition, the systematic silencing of women as a primary existential condition depicted in modern poetry remains the focus of few studies examining women's voices and resistance.

This study focuses on Maya Anthony's poetry as a space of modern literature in which otherness, silencing, and women's struggle for existence are clearly expressed. This allows this study to overcome the differences from previous studies. This study recently integrated Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory into the textual analysis of contemporary poetry. This study specifically examines how poetic symbols, metaphors, and thematic structures depict oppression, exploitation, and marginalisation. Therefore, this investigation provides a new understanding of women's existential struggles in contemporary literature and helps develop feminist literary criticism by expanding Beauvoir's theoretical framework into modern poetic discourse.

However, there are still few studies that specifically relate Beauvoir's theory to contemporary literary works, especially Maya Anthony's poetry that explicitly shows women's struggle to escape from silencing and gain freedom. This research is important because it has made progress in the study of feminism in literature, especially in Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist-feminist perspective.

This study will show that different types of oppression against women are present in language, symbols, and poetic imagery, as well as occurring in real life and social relationships. It will do so by analysing Maya Anthony's poetry. This research is also important to enhance our understanding of the role of women in contemporary literature. This research is expected to provide a new perspective on how women assert identity and freedom through art and self-expression through combining existentialist philosophy theory with poetry studies.

Therefore, this study looks at how Maya Anthony's poetry depicts the silencing of women's voices and their struggle to maintain their existence. The study will look at how the poems depict women's attempts to transcend social boundaries, rediscover their voices, and assert their existence as free individuals. This will be done using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist approach.

The poem portrays women not only as victims of patriarchal oppression, but also as individuals who challenge social boundaries and fight for freedom, equality and independence. This process reflects Beauvoir's idea of transcendence, in which women strive to move beyond their status as 'the Other' and become independent subjects.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How is women as 'Otherness' depicted in Maya Anthony's poetry?
2. How is women's struggle depicted in Maya Anthony's poetry?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how the concept of 'Otherness' is depicted in Maya Anthony's poetry.
2. To analyze how women's struggle is portrayed in Maya Anthony's poetry, particularly in relation to women's efforts to resist marginalization and assert their voices.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The section titled “Significance of the Study” explains the importance of the research, as well as its contributions and benefits. This section demonstrates how the research contributes to the development of theory or science (theoretical significance) and how its benefits can be applied by readers, researchers, or the public (practical significance).

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of literary criticism, particularly in the field of feminist literary studies, by applying Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of existentialist feminism to analyze the representation of women in selected poems by Maya Angelou. This study broadens our understanding of the concept of women’s “difference,” which Beauvoir defines as a manifestation of oppression, marginalization, exploitation, and silencing, as well as women’s struggle to defend their rights. Furthermore, this study enriches the existing discourse on how poetry portrays the experiences of women oppressed by patriarchy and depicts their journey toward freedom, autonomy, and transcendence. Furthermore, this study is expected to serve as a theoretical reference for future researchers interested in feminist literary criticism, existentialist feminism, and the analysis of gender issues in literary works.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

This is expected to offer practical benefits to various parties. For readers, it raises awareness and deepens understanding of how patriarchal oppression and women’s struggles are portrayed in literature, particularly in the works of Maya Angelou. For students and researchers, it can also serve as a reference for future studies on feminist literary criticism, Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialist feminism, and gender representation in works of art. Furthermore, it encourages readers to critically examine gender inequality.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on Maya Anthony's poetry taken from her 'collection of poems on gender inequality'. Five poems are selected for analysis there is 'Unseen Chain', 'Two Scales', 'Silent Voices', 'The Weight of Words', and 'The Unwritten Future'. The study is limited to the analysis of these selected poems and does not include works by other poets. This research employs Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory, particularly as presented in her book *The Second Sex*, as the main theoretical framework. The study does not compare Beauvoir's theory with other feminist theories or perspectives.