

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter comprises five general subchapters which are necessary to be informed in this research. Those are background of the study, statements of research question, objectives of the study, significances of the study, and scope and limitation.

1.1 Background of the Study

The study of literature today has presented many crucial topics dealing with the real life reflection in which the ideas of thought, feeling, and human experience are covered and presented. As the mirrors of the world, literature aims to represent cultures which capturing the world's stories into an interesting series of diction bounded in works. It deals with what Robert & Jacobs declared, "Literature refers to compositions that tell stories, dramatize situations, express emotions, and analyze and advocate ideas" (as cited in McKenzie, 2010:162). Therefore, along with the existence of literature, authors are capable to develop their life-experience into the imaginative acts. Thus, since the authors are the member of the society, it is acceptable if a literary work that they created is also affected by society, social condition in which the authors live so that they get their inspirations or their ideas based on both natural and social circumstances around them. It, hence, can be said that the literary work is presented as the author's experiences bond with their point of view in interpreting a social phenomenon which they ever passed. Further, as it is stated in Wellek and Waren:

Literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. But, furthermore, literature “imitates” “life”; and “life” is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been object of literary “imitation” (Wellek & Warren, 1956:89).

The statement above, in other words, explains the reality in social phenomenon in the real life is brought into the literary work. Its purpose is to represent what is happening in the real-life through the selection of diction in order to raise the specific sense of the spectators. It also, thus, deals with the life experience of the author or even another human experience in which the author is involved in. Those all scenes of both nature and social phenomenon are then captured by the author and be interpreted by an imaginative structure which aimed to generate the vicarious moods of human sense of emotions.

In recent decades, the discussion of social phenomenon especially about the existence of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) still becomes a controversial trending topic in the areas of human life, sex, and gender, within American sphere. The issues relating to LGBTQ have entered the national debate (Lynch, 2005:2). Furthermore, it is still common to reveal about LGBTQ people face high level of discrimination and also the stigma, disgrace, and marginalization in society. Hence, to deal with the aim of literary work, one of it is to reflect the social phenomena, it is a good start to concern about the author’s personal information which is relevant to our appreciation of their work.

If experience of gender and/or racial discrimination is an important factor in writers’ lives, then why isn’t it

important to know about the oppression suffered by gay, lesbian, and other nonstraight writers? (Tyson, 2006:318).

The statement above declares that any additional personal information about the authors, especially to heterosexual lives is relevant to their work. Therefore, it is also necessary to deliberate the oppression suffered by nonstraight authors, likewise LGBTQ authors, to let those information relating to how their sexual orientation affecting to their lives and also their literary production.

Furthermore, American literary work today has raised a considerable stage in the development of literature. Therefore, the discussion about LGBTQ existence in American literary production cannot be ignored or be marginalized. The LGBTQ people or can simply be called 'queer' people represent about ten percent of the population, and around the year of 2003, same-sex sexual activity is legalized in America. Yet, ironically, they are still facing discrimination. In this case, 'queer' people are headed to call for their existence to get the equal liberation. One of the ways they express their right is by communicating to society through literary work.

A starting point of this discussion, *If I Was Your Girl* novel written by Meredith Russo is selected to be analyzed. This choice of literary work has taken a specific consideration since this novel achieved an award and carry out a message from the author, who is also a trans-woman. Therefore, the writer finds that the analysis of this selected novel is quite interesting and necessary to be proposed for the following possible reasons.

This novel is firstly published in the UK in 2016 by Flatiron Book. It is quite brand-new novel since it is no more than five years after it is firstly published. Therefore, to conduct an analysis to the story delivered to the reader is still fresh and prime, thus, not many researchers have done any similar analysis. It is proven as the writer of this study has carefully taken a special attention to search if any similar analysis is done before, and it is still not found so far.

Another possible reason to select this novel to analyze is that, this novel amazingly achieved a good mark in United States in just about a year after publication. It won the 2017 Stonewall Book Award, sponsored by LGBT Round Table of the American Library Association (ALA), for the young adult category. It is a good impression for a debut novel to win an award in just a year publishing. Thus, this novel is verified as a wonderful work to express a specific emotion of the author (ALANews, 2017).

In addition, *If I Was Your Girl* is written by an American trans-woman. It was partially inspired by her experiences as a trans-woman. This, hence, becomes an interesting topic of discussion, in which this story is purely constructed from the real social phenomenon, and further, written by the one who is willing to express the ideas of how to be the real of you. As the trans-woman, Russo deliberates what is happening with the real transgender and other nonstraight people in the real society in her novel. It is quite necessary not to separate both social acceptance and injustice for performing transgender identity.

Furthermore, the storyline of this novel is interestingly narrated in a teen-romantic genre, which is expected to reach many readers who are around the

young age. A romantic genre is chosen to deliver transgender experience in an acceptable way, since many readers prefer to enjoy reading a love story. Because if she choose another genre likewise a thriller, society may expect worsen ideas about transgender existence. This is an expectation to tell about the transgender and other nonstraight people are lovable and beautiful as they are.

The aim of this study, thus, is to acknowledge the presence of transgender in American circumstances today which are unfortunately, the stigma attached being that nonstraight people is still quite strong in America today (Tyson, 2006:317), and to raise awareness of a growing discussion, written by a trans woman Meredith Russo within her debut novel *If I Was Your Girl*, dealing with the characters traits to portray the message to bring up equality to transgender and other nonstraight people. Russo once wrote on the very back of this novel page that ‘there is no wrong way to express and embody your most authentic self!’. For that reason, this novel is selected as the source of data to analyze the social reaction, also the disgrace, stigma, and marginalization toward the transgender existence.

This study focuses on both marginalization of transgender and their struggle to renounce their status as the part of society. Therefore, the writer investigates this issue by applying queer theory which is correlated with transgender issue regarding with the sexual orientation of the main character and the social reaction presented in the novel.

1.2 Statements of Research Question

Dealing with the background of the study presented above, the writer aims to identify a specific interest or topic of discussion to design an effective project with the following clear, relevant and intellectually questions which are formulated as follows:

1. How is the portrayal of marginalization experienced by transwoman in Meredith Russo's *If I Was Your Girl*?
2. How does the main character struggle to call for her existence in the society to reveal transgender liberation within *If I Was Your Girl* novel?

1.3 Objectives of The Study

Relating to the formulated research questions, this study is not intended to be a complete research without the following explanations:

1. The portrayal of marginalization experienced by transwoman in Meredith Russo's *If I Was Your Girl*.
2. The way the main character struggle to call for her existence in the society to reveal transgender liberation within *If I Was Your Girl* novel.

1.4 Significances of The Study

This study is expected to be able to provide both theoretical and practical profits. Theoretically, the result of this study can enrich the knowledge and understanding of applying queer criticism to analyze transgender issues. The result of this study is hopefully able to inspire the next researchers to write or to

do the further research about transgender issues and the broaden research, dealing with LGBTQ issues. This study also aimed to give the contribution for students' understanding and to raise awareness of a growing discussion regarding with transgender existence in America today governed and construed under the umbrella of lesbian, gay, and queer criticism in literary study. The result of this study, hopefully, can also be used for the reference to the next writer or researcher, who willing to analyze any related topic of discussion, especially to the English Department students in Trunojoyo University, Madura.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

Considering social inclusion in both acceptance and injustice to the transwoman, this study concerns the marginalization as the focus subject to analyze. In order to avoid any unrelated outward-discussion, the writer considers the scope and limitation to establish this study to set a preferable focus on the issue. This study focuses on the main character's utterances and on the author's narration which related to the issue of trans woman existence which linked to the social themes of acceptance and social injustice within Meredith Russo's debut novel *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) by applying queer criticism theory.