



The Portrayal of Female Masculinity in The Once and Future Witches Novel

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the portrayal of female masculinity in Alix E. Harrow's *The Once and Future Witches*. The research focuses on identifying masculine characteristics portrayed by female characters and explaining how female masculinity is represented in the novel. The study applies Janet Saltzman Chafetz's masculinity theory and Judith Halberstam's female masculinity theory. Qualitative textual analysis was used as the research method. The data were collected from narrations and dialogues spoken by female characters in the novel. The findings show that female characters portray bravery, independence, emotional restraint, rationality, leadership, and aggressiveness. The study also identifies three categories of female masculinity represented in the novel, namely butch realness, femme pretender, and male mimicry. The portrayal of female

masculinity in the novel reflects women's resistance against patriarchal systems and traditional gender stereotypes. The study concludes that masculinity is not exclusive to men because women can also embody masculine traits through appearance, social behavior, and actions. The novel also promotes broader understanding about gender identity and gender expression.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is one of the important media used to reflect social conditions, human experiences, and cultural ideologies. Through literary works, authors are able to represent social issues related to race, class, culture, and gender. Gender becomes one of the most discussed issues in literary criticism because literary works frequently portray social expectations regarding masculinity and femininity. In traditional society, masculinity is commonly associated with men, while femininity is associated with women (Blackstone, 2003). Masculinity is often represented through bravery, leadership,

rationality, aggressiveness, and independence. Meanwhile, femininity is represented through emotionality, tenderness, passiveness, and dependence.

However, modern gender theories challenge these traditional assumptions. Gender is no longer viewed as biologically determined but socially constructed. Judith Butler (1990) explains that gender is performative because it is repeatedly performed through actions, behavior, and language. Similarly, Judith Halberstam (1998) argues that masculinity is not naturally owned by men. Women can also embody masculine characteristics and identities. This phenomenon is known as female masculinity.

Female masculinity refers to the appearance of masculine characteristics in women through appearance, attitude, behavior, language, and social roles (Halberstam, 1998). Female masculinity challenges patriarchal assumptions that masculinity belongs exclusively to men. Women who portray masculine characteristics are often viewed as violating social norms because society expects women to remain feminine. Therefore, female masculinity becomes an important topic in gender studies and literary criticism.

The portrayal of female masculinity can be found in many literary works. Female characters are frequently represented as brave, independent, intelligent, and dominant figures who resist patriarchal oppression. Such portrayals challenge stereotypes about women and provide alternative understandings of gender identity (Ambjornsson, 2020). Literary works become powerful tools to criticize social inequality and gender discrimination.

One of the novels that portrays female masculinity strongly is *The Once and Future Witches* written by Alix E. Harrow. The novel tells the story of three sisters, Beatrice Belladonna Eastwood, Agnes Amaranth Eastwood, and James Juniper Eastwood, who reunite in New Salem during the women's suffrage movement. The women struggle against patriarchal oppression while reviving witchcraft as a symbol of female resistance and empowerment.

The female characters in the novel portray masculine characteristics such as bravery, aggressiveness, rationality, leadership, and independence. They challenge patriarchal systems that attempt to control women's voices, rights, and identities. Through their struggles, the novel represents female masculinity as resistance against traditional gender expectations.

Several previous studies have analyzed female masculinity in literary works. However

most previous studies only focused on a single character or discussed female masculinity generally without analyzing different categories of female masculinity. Therefore, this study attempts to provide broader analysis by identifying masculine characteristics portrayed by several female characters and categorizing the forms of female masculinity based on Judith Halberstam's (1998) theory.

This research aims to analyze masculine characteristics portrayed by female characters and explain how female masculinity is represented in *The Once and Future Witches* novel. The findings are expected to contribute to literary criticism and gender studies by providing broader understanding about female masculinity in literature.

METHOD

This study applied qualitative research using textual analysis method (Smith, 2017). Qualitative research is appropriate for literary analysis because it focuses on interpreting meanings, symbols, and representations found in literary texts. Textual analysis allows researchers to understand how literary works construct social and cultural meanings related to gender identity.

The source of data in this research was *The Once and Future Witches* novel written by Alix E. Harrow (2020). The data consisted of narrations, dialogues, character descriptions, and actions related to female masculinity portrayed by female characters. The main female characters analyzed in this study included Beatrice Belladonna Eastwood, Agnes Amaranth Eastwood, James Juniper Eastwood, and Cleopatra Quinn.

The researcher used documentation technique to collect the data. First, the researcher read the novel carefully several times in order to understand the storyline, characterization, and social context. Second, relevant dialogues and narrations related to masculinity and female masculinity were highlighted. Third, the data were categorized based on masculine characteristics and forms of female masculinity.

The study applied Janet Saltzman Chafetz's (1978) theory of masculinity to identify masculine characteristics portrayed by female characters. Chafetz (1978) explains that masculinity includes physical, emotional, intellectual, interpersonal, and other social characteristics such as bravery, leadership, aggressiveness, independence, and rationality. In addition, Judith Halberstam's (1998) theory of female masculinity was applied to categorize forms of female masculinity represented in the novel.

The data analysis involved several steps. First, the researcher identified masculine characteristics portrayed by female characters. Second, the researcher classified the data into categories of female masculinity. Third, the researcher interpreted the findings based on gender theories and literary context. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the overall findings and discussions.

The researcher ensured the validity of the data by carefully rereading the novel and comparing the findings with relevant theories and previous studies. The analysis focused on textual evidence in order to provide accurate interpretation regarding the portrayal of female masculinity in the novel.

RESULTS

The findings reveal that the female characters in *The Once and Future Witches* portray several masculine characteristics. Based on Chafetz's (1978) masculinity theory, the masculine characteristics found in the novel include bravery, emotional restraint, leadership, independence, rationality, aggressiveness, and confidence.

James Juniper Eastwood strongly portrays bravery and aggression throughout the story. Juniper frequently confronts enemies directly and protects vulnerable women from oppression. She also becomes one of the leaders of the Sisters of Avalon and motivates women to fight for their rights. Her rebellious personality and fearless behavior reflect masculine courage and authority. Juniper refuses to submit to patriarchal control and continuously resists social oppression.

Agnes Amaranth Eastwood portrays emotional restraint and responsibility. Agnes frequently suppresses her emotions in order to protect her family and sisters. She demonstrates physical strength and courage in dangerous situations. Agnes also portrays independence because she survives difficult circumstances without depending on men. Her character reflects masculine responsibility and self-control.

Beatrice Belladonna Eastwood portrays intellectual masculinity. Beatrice is intelligent, rational, and analytical. She carefully studies folklore and witchcraft in order to support the women's movement. Beatrice often uses logic and strategy before making decisions. Her calm and rational personality challenges stereotypes that women are emotional and irrational.

Cleopatra Quinn portrays masculine confidence and appearance. Quinn wears

masculine clothing such as coats, trousers, and derby hats. She also speaks assertively and confidently in conversations. Her appearance and behavior challenge traditional feminine expectations. Quinn's masculinity is portrayed naturally and confidently without attempting to hide feminine identity completely.

The findings also reveal three categories of female masculinity based on Halberstam's (1998) theory. Cleopatra Quinn represents butch realness because she naturally embodies masculine appearance and behavior. Her masculine style becomes part of her identity and social expression. Beatrice Belladonna represents femme pretender because she combines feminine appearance with masculine intelligence and leadership. Agnes and Juniper portray male mimicry through aggressive gestures, emotional control, and dominant behavior patterns.

DISCUSSIONS

The portrayal of female masculinity in the novel reflects resistance against patriarchal ideology and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). The female characters challenge the assumption that women must remain passive, emotional, and dependent. Instead, the novel portrays women as powerful individuals who are capable of leadership, courage, and rational thinking.

The novel also emphasizes solidarity among women. Female masculinity in the story is not portrayed as competition against men but as empowerment for women. The female characters support one another while fighting against oppression and injustice. Through this solidarity, the novel promotes gender equality and social justice.

The findings support Halberstam's (1998) theory that female masculinity is a legitimate form of gender expression. Female masculinity is not simply imitation of men but a unique expression of identity performed by women. The female characters create their own forms of masculinity while maintaining individuality and resistance against patriarchal norms.

In addition, the novel represents gender as fluid and socially constructed (Butler, 1990). The portrayal of female masculinity demonstrates that gender identity is not fixed biologically. Through appearance, actions, and behavior, women are able to embody masculine characteristics in different ways. Therefore, the novel encourages readers to reconsider rigid gender expectations imposed by society.

This study also reveals that literary works can function as media of social criticism (Tyson, 2006). Through female masculinity, *The Once and Future Witches* criticizes patriarchal oppression and inequality experienced by women. The novel advocates freedom, equality, and empowerment for women through the struggles of the female characters.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussions, the study concludes that female characters in *The Once and Future Witches* portray various masculine characteristics such as bravery, leadership, aggressiveness, emotional restraint, rationality, confidence, and independence. These masculine characteristics are represented through the female characters' actions, personalities, appearances, and social behavior.

The study also identifies three categories of female masculinity based on Judith Halberstam's theory, namely butch realness, femme pretender, and male mimicry. Cleopatra Quinn represents butch realness because of her masculine appearance and behavior. Beatrice Belladonna represents femme pretender because she combines feminine identity with masculine intelligence and leadership. Agnes and Juniper represent male mimicry through dominant and assertive behavior.

The portrayal of female masculinity in the novel challenges patriarchal assumptions and traditional gender stereotypes. The novel demonstrates that masculinity is not exclusive to men because women can also embody masculine characteristics in different forms. Female masculinity becomes a form of empowerment and resistance against social oppression.

This research contributes to literary criticism and gender studies by expanding understanding about female masculinity represented in literary works. Future researchers are encouraged to analyze female masculinity in films, dramas, or other literary genres in order to provide broader perspectives regarding gender representation and identity.

The representation of female masculinity in the novel also indicates that women's resistance is closely related to social and political struggles. The women in the story are marginalized not only because of gender but also because of power structures controlled by patriarchal institutions. Their masculine characteristics become symbolic tools for

survival and resistance. By portraying women as brave and independent figures, the novel rejects stereotypes that define women as weak or passive individuals.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates how female masculinity can coexist with feminine identity. The female characters do not completely abandon femininity; instead, they combine masculine and feminine traits according to their experiences and needs. This portrayal emphasizes that gender identity is complex and multidimensional. Masculinity and femininity should not be viewed as strict opposites but as flexible identities that can coexist within individuals.

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