WOMEN PORTRAYAL IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY
THROUGH FEMALE MAIN CHARACTERS
IN ZEMECKIS’ BEOWULF FILM (2007)

Christian Barli, Surya Sili, Nita Maya Valiantien

English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences,
Mulawarman University
Email: c.barli@yahoo.com.sg

ABSTRACT

Patriarchy system which forms gender stereotypes and its issues, consciously or not is easily found in daily life. Gender stereotypes are strengthened by patriarchy system which includes judgments of surrounding society, and forms two categories; masculinity (men stereotypes) and femininity (women stereotypes) which referred from the different biological characteristics among men and women, to empower men and disempower women in society. The purposes of this research were to analyze the portrayal of patriarchy system which is portrayed in the Zemeckis’ Beowulf film, and to analyze the portrayal of female main characters who break patriarchy system which is portrayed in the film. This research was designed as a qualitative research, and the theory of patriarchy by Allan G. Johnson was used as the ground theory. The results of the research showed that patriarchy system and its four elements such as male dominance, male identification, male centeredness, and obsession with control are promoted in the society which is portrayed in the Zemeckis’ Beowulf film (2007). Although the two female main characters of the film live in a society which is patriarchal, but they do not fall into the patriarchy system and the gender stereotypes that are imposed on them as subordinate women, instead they challenge and break the social systems.

Key words: Beowulf film, gender stereotypes, main characters, patriarchy, women portrayal.

ABSTRAK

Sistem patriarki yang membentuk stereotip gender dan isu-isu terkait lainnya, mudah ditemui dalam kehidupan sehari-hari secara sadar atau tidak. Stereotip gender dilingkupi dan diperkuat oleh sistem patriarki yang mencakup anggapan-anggapan dalam kehidupan bermasyarakat yang mana membentuk dua kategori, yakni; maskulinitas (stereotip pria) dan feminitas (stereotip wanita). Anggapan-anggapan berdasarkan dua kategori gender tersebut mengacu pada perbedaan karakteristik pria dan wanita secara biologis demi menguatkan kuasa serta wewenang pria, dan melemahkan peran dan posisi wanita dalam masyarakat. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis penggambaran sistem

Kata kunci: Film Beowulf, stereotyp gender, tokoh utama, patriarki, penggambaran perempuan

A. BACKGROUND

Women stereotypes issues, or in the wider scope as gender stereotypes that socially includes also men in it, consciously or not are easily found in daily life. The issues can be as what women or men are supposed to do or to be through the judgments of surrounding society in daily life. The gender stereotype values form two categories; masculinity and femininity which threaten society whether men, and especially women, being in situations of tension and anxiety (Brannon 159). Then, the stereotypes of gender are strengthened by the patriarchy system in a patriarchal society as well. “According to the patriarchal, for example, men are aggressive, daring, rational, emotionally inexpressive, strong, coolheaded, in control of themselves, independent, active, objective, dominant, decisive, self-confident, and unnurturing. Women are portrayed in opposite terms, such as unaggressive, shy, intuitive, emotionally expressive, nurturing, weak, hysterical, erratic and lacking in self-control (especially when menstruating), dependent, passive, subjective, submissive, indecisive, and lacking in self-confidence” (Johnson 80). Moreover, as what Brannon also explains about gender stereotypes in work spheres that, women are supposed to taking care of children, their work area is inside of home, etc. Whereas, it is quite different compared to men who are reputed to have strong characteristics, supposed to work outside home, work with the harsh works, etc (161).

People in society are culturally trapped inside a legacy whose core is patriarchal which promotes male privilege; such as by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered with obsession of control (Johnson 5). Nonetheless, women are still adored because they have characteristics and appearances that inevitable signify beauty, attractiveness, sensitivity, flabbiness, maternity and other women’s natural values in their soul and physical as well. It is reasonable that women are adored in society because of their
beautiful characteristics since, “beauty work occurs within a social system that distributes rewards and sanctions based partially on appearance” (Kwan and Trautner 50).

Despite patriarchal system promotes the male privileges and the traits of masculinity which represent power and domination of men, it is not always true that women do not have kinds of traits such as; power, independent, domination, and even masculine traits in themselves like what can be found in some women who have power like men in the sport field. Such strong women also do martial arts, football, climbing, wrestling, rafting, and other sports which usually identified to be men’s sports. Johnson also explains some examples of women who are strong and have power like men, can be found from significant international figures like Secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton and Supreme Court justices Sonia Sotomayor, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and Elena Kagan. Although they are as women, but they are all far more powerful than most men will ever be (6). Although those women figures do not have full authority in changing the patriarchal society and the whole patriarchy system, but at least they have power, independent traits, and they do not fall into the patriarchy system that promotes the stereotypes of women that imposed by society on them.

Issues about strong and independent female characters who do not fall into the traits of women stereotype or feminine traits also exist in Beowulf film (2007) which was directed by Robert Zemeckis. It is an American motion capture fantasy film.

Finally, through the Beowulf film which was directed by Robert Zemeckis in 2007, this research was focused on how patriarchal society are portrayed in the film, where Queen Wealthow and Grendel’s Mother as the female main characters of the film live in. In addition, the researcher also discussed how the two female characters struggle to challenge and break the social patriarchy systems in the film, and whether they fall into women stereotypes. The theory of patriarchy system by Allan G. Johnson was used to explain the portrayal of patriarchy system which found in the society of the Beowulf film. Besides using patriarchy theory by Allan G. Johnson, there are also some discussions of experts, other supporting theories, and articles that were used to examine the women stereotype traits which faced by Queen Wealthow and Grendel’s Mother as the female characters in the patriarchal society which is portrayed in the Zemeckis’ Beowulf film (2007).

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

1. Patriarchy System

Guarneri and Poston explain that, “the term patriarchy comes from Latin pater (father) and arch (rule)” (par. 1). They also define that, patriarchy is a social structural phenomenon in which males have the privilege of dominance over females, both visibly and subliminally. According to Warnock, there is no more accurate cliché in describing patriarchy than saying the phrase “it’s a man’s world” (28). Walby defines “patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (20).

Culturally, as what Johnson states that, “we are trapped inside a legacy whose core is patriarchal” (5). According to Johnson, there are four elements of patriarchy system in society, which are the privileges of men that are promoted in patriarchal society such as; male dominance, male identification, male centeredness and male’s obsession with control
“Patriarchy is *male dominated* in that positions of authority—political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic—are generally reserved for men” (Johnson 6). “Patriarchal societies are *male identified* in that core cultural ideas about what is considered good, desirable, preferable, or normal are culturally associated with how we think about men, manhood, and masculinity” (Johnson 7). “In addition to being male dominated and male identified, patriarchy is *male centered*, which means that the focus of attention is primarily on men and boys and what they do” (Johnson 10). “As with any system of privilege that elevates one group by oppressing another, control is an essential element of patriarchy: men maintaining their privilege by controlling both women and other men who might threaten it” (Johnson 13).

2. Gender Stereotypes

Brannon states that, “*gender stereotype* consists of beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as the activities appropriate to, men or women” (160). As what Johnson also explains that, “the obsession with sex and gender revolves around two concepts--femininity and masculinity--that encourage us to think about men and women as different kinds of people. As the patriarchal story goes, women are essentially feminine and men are essentially masculine, and as long as each stays in their own designated territory, life goes on as it’s supposed to” (80). Patriarchal system perspective encourages categories based on both different sexes socially, which from this perspective is that men acting masculine and women acting feminine. In the simplest sense that, patriarchy system is what defines masculinity and femininity, which are cultural ideas about who men and women are, and who they are supposed to be in society (Johnson 80). To be concluded, the traits of masculinity and femininity according to patriarchal culture are portrayed by Johnson, as follow:

a. Masculine: “men are aggressive, daring, rational, emotionally inexpressive, strong, coolheaded, in control of themselves, independent, active, objective, dominant, decisive, self-confident, and unnurturing” (Johnson 80).

b. Feminine: “women are unaggressive, shy, intuitive, emotionally expressive, nurturing, weak, hysterical, erratic and lacking in self-control (especially when menstruating), dependent, passive, subjective, submissive, indecisive, and lacking in self-confidence” (Johnson 80).

3. Patriarchy and Strong Women in Films

Patriarchy system also exists in media which is as cultural product of real society. The kind of social pattern that found in patriarchal society also happens in the productions of film as the reflection of real society, which men have their own privilege in society. According to Salinas, “in the film industry, women comprised just 9 percent of the directors of the top 250 domestic grossing films of 2013 and 38 percent of the documentary directors whose gender bias” (3). “Women get low recognition (basically they are unseen) for their performance in the film industry. The 2015 Academy Awards nominated more men than women in non-acting categories by the margin of 5 to 1” (Salinas 3). Salinas later explains that, women have only won once, the Academy Award for directing, writing, original screenplay or adapted screenplay (3).
Moreover, as what Johnson also explains that, there are many list of films which had been awarded the Oscar for Best Picture since 1962 are mostly focus on men’s life. Whereas, almost fifty films, only four films that tell a story through the life of someone who is female, such as; Million Dollar Baby, Chicago, Out of Africa, and Terms of Endearment, only three of these focus on a serious subject, with the other being a musical (11). Nevertheless, since the existence of the feminism movements that struggled for the women’s rights started in the 18th century, it then affected also to the feminists’ movement in film industry. Smelik states that, “the diversity of contemporary feminist film theory reflects the variegated production of women’s cinema of the 1990’s. Women film-makers have increasingly conquered Hollywood” (501).

4. Characterization

Hallet explains that, characterization is the process by which fictional characters are represented and developed. Whereas, character is the mental, emotional, and social qualities to distinguish one entity from another (people, animals, spirits, automatons, pieces of furniture, and other animated objects) (7).

From all of that, to understand character and its characterization are explained by Reaske (1966) about devices of characterization, as follow:

a. The appearance of the character

Characterization can be learned through how the appearance of character is described or portrayed. Reaske argues that, “in other words, in the mere appearance of character we locate our first understanding of him” (46).

b. Asides and soliloquies

It can be learned from the characters as they speak. Especially, it is the best to understand when the characters speak in short asides or in longer soliloquies, in which give effect to the audiences of their specific character is, in effect. Reaske gives examples the use of asides and soliloquies in characterization such as: if he is a villain, he usually explains his evil intentions or at least his malicious hopes. If he is a lover, he offers us poetic statements of devotion, or if a hero torn between love and duty, he tells us as the audiences about his conflicts, and his resulting agony (46).

c. Dialogue between characters

Reaske explains that, to understand characterization of a character is not only through when the character speaks to himself alone, but it is also from his language when speaking to others show a great deal of light on his personality (47).

d. Hidden narration

The hidden narration is not found from the direct author comment in the literary work or film. The narration from one character’s estimation upon other characters can be wrong or right. Reaske explains that, there is great interplay between the author’s characterization of certain people in literary work through their own words and action (47).

e. Language

Reaske explains that too many times the language of any given character, is not extremely as the central of the personality character’s attributes. When
characterization needs to be understood further, it is not only paying our attention to the words of character uses, but also we must be careful to the way the character speaks (47).

f. **Character in action**

Reaske explains that, motivation usually translates into action in the real world and there is no reason to assume that the same does not hold true in the world of the characters (48).

5. **Robert Zemeckis’ *Beowulf* Film (2007)**

*Beowulf* film which was directed by Robert Zemeckis, is an American motion capture fantasy film which written by Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary. This film was inspired by the Old English epic poem titled *Beowulf* as well, and it was created in 3-D effect. The author and the screenwriter of this film, Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary wrote the adaptation of the *Beowulf* in May 1997, and started the production with Robert Zemeckis at the same year. Then, this Beowulf film was released in the United Kingdom and United States on November 16, 2007, and was distributed by Paramount Pictures (United States) and Warner Bros. Pictures (International). The Beowulf film includes some famous actors and actresses in it. The cast of the film are Ray Winstone (Beowulf), Robin Wright Penn (Queen Wealtheow), Crispin Glover (Grendel), Angelina Jolie (Grendel’s Mother), Anthony Hopkins (King Hrothgar), John Malkovic (Unferth), Brendal Gleeson (Wiglaf), etc.

**C. RESEARCH METHOD**

**1. Research Design**

This present research is designed as a qualitative research. According to Patton and Cochran, “qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than words, as data for analysis” (2). Mason explains that, a wide dimension of social world which includes such as the everyday life, the ways of social processes, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, institutions, discourse or relationships works, and others, can be explored through qualitative research (1).

Therefore, this present research fits into such matters those included in qualitative research, since this research describes and discusses how patriarchy system in society which is portrayed through Grendel’s Mother and Queen Wealtheow characterizations of Zemeckis’s *Beowulf*.

**2. Data Sources**

The main data source of this present research is Robert Zemeckis’ *Beowulf* film, which was published by Paramount Pictures (United States) and Warner Bros. Pictures (International) in 2007. The data were presented in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, dialogues and pictures that are related to the women’s role through the script of the *Beowulf* film, especially the characterization of Grendel’s Mother and Queen Wealtheow which are acted by Angelina Jolie and Robin Wright Penn. The secondary
sources of this present research data were taken from some chosen previous researches, theories, journals which written by scholars, experts, and also articles from internet sources that are around the discussions on patriarchy, gender stereotypes, and some insights of Beowulf story.

3. Data Collection

The researcher used several steps to collect the data needed to be examined. The first step is watching Zemeckis’ Beowulf (2007) and focused on the patriarchy system issues, and specifically on the gender stereotypes issues. The second step is the researcher isolated words, phrases, and sentences through dialogues as well as the narration of the film scenes which are relevant to the issues of how patriarchy system is portrayed, and the acts of Grendel’s Mother and Queen Wealthowe characters who break the patriarchy system, especially the gender stereotypes. In the last step, the researcher read collected additional previous researches, journals, articles, and experts’ theories, as well as used them to support the data analysis of the present research.

4. Data Analysis

The present research describes portrayal of patriarchy system in society which portrayed in Zemeckis’ Beowulf film where the Grendel’s Mother and Queen Wealthowe characters live in. Then, this present research discusses how the patriarchy system, especially the gender stereotypes being broken by these women characters of the Beowulf film. To analyze the Zemeckis’ Beowulf film, the data were reduced then sorted i.e. only those represent patriarchy system, gender stereotype, and the characterizations of the main female characters within the society of the film were included. Then, the data of the film were analyzed further using the theories which have been explained in the review of related literature. In the last step, the researcher discussed as well as drew conclusion based on the findings and supporting analysis.

5. Research Instrument

In this present research, the research instrument is the researcher himself. The researcher focused on observing and discussing the Zemeckis’ Beowulf film (2007) by using the patriarchy system theories of Allan G. Johnson. In addition, the researcher used several related theories and supporting materials related to patriarchy and gender stereotype to help the researcher in conducting this present research.

6. Triangulation

According to Patton and Cochran, “triangulation is one method for increasing validity of findings, through deliberately seeking evidence from a wide range of sources and comparing findings from those different sources” (26). In triangulation method, findings are more dependable as they are confirmed from several independent sources. Then, their validity is enhanced when they are confirmed by more than one “instrument” measuring the same thing (O’Connor and Gibson 74). Norman Denzin in 1978 identified that there are four basic types of triangulation; data triangulation, methods triangulation,
investigator triangulation, and theory triangulation (qtd. in Rugg 14). In this present research, the researcher used the data triangulation and the theory triangulation to interpret and to get better results and validity of the data findings.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. The Portrayal of Patriarchy System in Zemeckis’ Beowulf Film

The portrayal of patriarchy system in the Beowulf film were divided into four parts which referred to the Johnson’s patriarchy theory that includes privileges of men; male dominance, male identification, male centeredness, and the obsession with control.

a. Male Dominance

According to Johnson, “patriarchy is male dominated in that positions of authority—political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic—are generally reserved for men” (6). In the Dane society which is portrayed in the Zemeckis’ Beowulf film, male dominance is promoted. One of the findings can be seen in religious sphere which is portrayed through Unferth character which is found at time at time 01:13:18.

“Unferth dresses like a priest when he wants to meet Beowulf for showing that his slave found the lost golden horn. He is portrayed using cross on his long garment which represent his Christian faith”.

The film summary above indicates that Unferth is a priest. The other evidence in the film that reveals Unferth as a priest in film can be seen through his religious activities. It is portrayed in the dialogue between Unferth and Aesher at time 01:54.

Unferth : This is how it works, Aesher. After you die, you wouldn't really be dead providing you have accepted him as the one and only God.

b. Male Identification

According to Johnson, “patriarchal societies are male identified in that core cultural ideas about what is considered good, desirable, preferable, or normal are culturally associated with how we think about men, manhood, and masculinity” (Johnson 7). Male identification is promoted in the Dane society which is portrayed in the Zemeckis’ Beowulf film. One of the findings can be seen in the following data at time 40:41.

Beowulf : I am ripper, tearer, slasher, gouger.
I am the teeth in the darkness, the talons in the night.
Mine is strength and lust and power!

Through the statement of Beowulf to Grendel in the dialogue above, Beowulf clearly describes himself with masculine traits that show his competitiveness in the fight against Grendel, while at the same time Grendel shrinks gradually to death. Besides that, Beowulf also shows his decisiveness trait when he speaks to Grendel in the fight loudly and
with no doubt. Moreover, self-sufficiency, toughness, forcefulness, coolness under pressure, and invulnerability traits of Beowulf can be seen during the fight.

c. Male Centeredness
According to Johnson, “patriarchy is male centered which means that the focus of attention is primarily on men and boys and what they do” (10). Male centeredness is also portrayed in the film. One of the findings can be seen as Dane women talk about Beowulf.

Dane Woman 1 : They say he ripped the monster's limb off with his bare hands.

Dane Woman 2 : I wonder if Beowulf's strength is only in his arms, or in his legs as well, all three of them?...

It can be seen in the data above that Beowulf who is as a man becomes the center of Dane women’s attention in the film.

d. The Obsession with Control
Johnson explains that, the primacy of control that existed in society becomes the cultural standard for a truly superior human being, which is then takes side to men, as well as justifies men’s privileged position in society (13). In Dane society which is portrayed in the film, male’s obsession with control is clearly portrayed. One of the findings can be seen as how Hrothgar not only compelling Wealtheow to kiss him, Hrothgar also compels Wealtheow to sleep with him, as what can be seen at time 42:07.

Hrothgar : Here, my beauty, give me a kiss.
I want a kiss! Give me a kiss!
I want a kiss!

In the data above, Hrothgar acts that he has control over Wealtheow, although Wealtheow does not want to be obedient.

2. Breaking Patriarchy System Zemeckis’ Beowulf Film

Although the Dane kingdom society which is portrayed in the film is patriarchal, but there Queen Wealtheow and Grendel’s Mother, who are portrayed as strong women that challenge and break the system of patriarchy in the society. The existences of the two female main characters in the film challenge and break the elements of patriarchal societies, which are male dominance, male identification, male centeredness, and male’s obsession with control.

a. The Patriarchy Breaking by Queen Wealtheow
One of the findings that portray how Queen Wealtheow challenges and breaks the patriarchy system can be found at time 42:07.
Hrothgar : Come to bed, my sweet.
   My kingdom needs an heir!
   I need a son! It's time you did your duty.

Queen Wealthow : How can I ever lay with you,
   knowing you laid with her?

The data dialogue above portrays when King Hrothgar asks Wealthow to sleep or have intercourse with him. But, in the dialogue of Wealthow above, it is clearly portrayed that she bravely refuses to sleep with Hrothgar since she knew that Hrothgar had slept with Grendel’s Mother. This evidence indicates that Queen Wealthow is portrayed breaking the male’s *obsession with control*, which is one of patriarchy element.

*b. The Patriarchy Breaking by Grendel’s Mother*

One of the findings that portrays Queen Wealthow challenges and breaks the patriarchy system was found at time 49:24.

Wiglaf : In the name of Odin! Is Grendel not dead?
   Has he grown his arm anew?

Hrothgar : It’s not Grendel.

Wiglaf : Not Grendel? Then who?

Hrothgar : His mother.

The dialogue of scene portrays when Wiglaf in a morning sees so many corpses of Dane kingdom soldiers and his friends are hanging and scattered in kingdom mead hall. He really wonders who kills the men because he does not know if there still exists another monster, so he asks Hrothgar about the truth. Then, Hrothgar answers and reveals that the doer is Grendel’s Mother. The dialogue evidence above portrays all at once that Grendel’s Mother has masculine qualities such as *strength, toughness, forcefulness,* and *competitiveness,* instead of having feminine qualities such as; *vulnerability, empathy, compassion, caring, and readiness to negotiate,* and *compromise.* She is portrayed breaking male identification which is one of patriarchy elements according to Johnson.

**E. CONCLUSIONS**

In this research, the researcher concluded some conclusions based on the research questions by using the Allan G. Johnson’s patriarchy theory as the ground theory. Firstly, the findings of the research are in line with patriarchy theory by Johnson that, patriarchy system and its male privileges such as; male *dominance, male identification, male centeredness,* and male’s *obsession with control* are promoted in the Dane kingdom society which is portrayed in the *Beowulf* film. The *male dominance* portrayal is found the film as some male main characters are found occupying important and highest social spheres portrayed in the film, whereas there are no female characters who occupy high and important position in any social spheres portrayed in the film. *Male identification* and men’s masculine qualities are also really identified as good, desirable, and valued much in
the film, since the film mostly portrays heroic deeds and men’s fights. Whereas, female characters and their femininity are valued lower than men, and even are equalized as ‘property’. They are only prized for their beauty. Then, the Dane society which is portrayed in the film is clearly male centered as the plot and scenes of the film mostly include much about masculine traits, men’s heroic deeds, and many more men characters compared to the female characters. Moreover, male’s privileges in the Dane society are clearly maintained through the obsession with control that accompanies the deeds of the male characters in the film. Therefore, the findings also clearly assert that the Dane society which is portrayed in the film is a patriarchal society, since the society is ruled by patriarchy system that promotes the four male privileges according to Johnson. As the patriarchy system happens in the Dane kingdom society which is portrayed in the film, it gives disadvantageous impact to the female characters who live in the kind of society, since the patriarchal society is a ‘men’s world’, and full of male privileges.

Nevertheless Queen Wealtheow and Grendel’s Mother live in the Dane kingdom society which is patriarchal without having and occupying any significant position with authorities, but as female main characters in the film they still can challenge and even break the male privileges in the Dane kingdom society. They do not really fall or suffer by living in the society which is patriarchal that promotes male privileges such as, male dominance, male identification, male centeredness, and male’s obsession with control, instead they break those male privileges. Beside Queen Wealtheow and Grendel’s Mother break those patriarchy elements which are male privileges in patriarchal society, they also do not fall into women stereotypes which impose them as weak and subordinate women who are then ruled by the system of patriarchy. Instead, they are portrayed as female characters who possess masculine qualities in themselves. It is because of the two female main characters make the most what is left to them around men’s lives and the gaps of the patriarchy system. Moreover, they live independently according to their will, although in some points of their life and their roles connected to relationship in family or private sphere of them, they live as feminine women.

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