

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Masculinity refers to the male identity that is the construction is often associated with culture, social and religion, in what a man should be. It is something that is often in the center of literary culture, especially for the Victorians, who although living under a Queen of Victoria, still held the view of men were superior than women. The ideals a man was held to change and shift a great deal over this time period, and what made a man appear *Manly* frequently contradicted some of the other authors with what they think in the reality (Tosh, 1999: 221). During the Victorian period, the man was the breadwinner and head of the family and household. It was a time where economic and social advancements reached that has not happened previously. The men reflected with these qualities were expected to be dutiful and attentive husbands and fathers.

Furthermore, the men in that era based their life on their sense of what was right and proper for them. Their home was in many cases where they grew up and learned how to run their future home. Hence, it was also a time in history when gender is characterized by what is known as the private sphere of family were the woman's responsibility while the men tended to the public sphere, such as work, politic, government, which is the system of family is applied patriarchal society, which such the system means males are positioned superior than women in all sectors of life, whether domestic or public and do not allow women to have same privileges

as men (Steinbach, 2012: 23). Therefore, mostly the construction of the concept of masculinity is associated by what influenced from Victorian culture or tradition.

From those descriptions, Victorian men must fulfil the qualities as expected by the society that are the men are gentlemen, responsible, brave, strong and good manner in order they can be characterized as masculine. Nevertheless, not all men in that period can fulfill the quality as what the society of women expected, because some of them have lack of man. The issue of this concept of masculinity challenges many Victorian authors to make it into different story, like Oscar Wilde. Wilde tried to criticize the way of life in Victorian period which at the times in where he lived, through his one of the best play *The Importance of Being Ernest*. He revealed about the weakness of masculinity in which female character has power than male, and it portrays about how men called as masculine and gentle from their success in marriage and to be good head of family that able to provide the harmony and prosperity in their household (Barker, 2007).

Wilde is a famous Victorian author who smart play words in his masterpiece, and mostly his masterpieces had done in satire to all the way of thinking or life of Victorian society. In his play, *The Importance of Being Ernest* is introduced to characters and exposed to their behaviors, through this, readers see the subservient from society's norms creating the disorder, depression, and confusion that aids the comedy within the play. The way of the play is in itself structured, and also the idea that men are superior to women is upheld in the play. Therefore, in this paper, the writer is interested to conduct research, especially in analyzing the portrayal of

masculinity in Victorian period as reflected through Oscar's play "*The Importance of Being Ernest*".

The Importance of Being Ernest is first time performed on February 14, 1895 in James theater, England. It kinds of comedy play, which the protagonist characters, Jack and Algernon create their fictitious personality to avoid social obligation that made heavy against the male characters. It opens with two great men move the right to color their life by creating fictitious personalities. Jack escapes the burdens of responsibility to have an exciting life in the city, pretending to be his fictitious younger brother named Ernest, as accordance with his name is honest, making women trusted to that good identity, while Algernon made Bunbury, as his close sick friend who used as an excuse to gallivant off to the country.

However, when Algernon suspected Jack's double life, Ernest, then he used named Ernest also to attract Cecily's love who is adopted sister of Jack in London. Besides, Jack who was falling in love also with Algernon's cousin, Gwendollen, who is daughter of Lady Bracknell falls into Ernest as fictitious character Jack, so when the two women attracted to a man, Ernest, then it was made conflict about their love.

Finally, when Lady Bracknell comes to London and knew that Jack is Ernest who made manipulation to get love of Gwendollen and tell the truth of his identity to her daughter. In the end of the story, the two men and two women after finding their true identities find happily ever after then getting married each other. Actually, this play do not too emphasize the message but only to satirize hypocrisy of Victorian society at the time. And from this story reveals that there is no find what is described

as what view of masculinity as Victorian constructed through the male characters made by Wilde in his play. So, it becomes challenging work to find what truly the qualities and concept of masculinity itself that exist in Victorian period.

The reason of chosen this play to be used as the object is because there is the strength of aesthetics and social critics in how the way of Victorian moral that dominantly happen at the period by with his comedy style, contemplative. In addition, this play provides themes touching into various topics, like critic social, and because of there is issue about unlikely masculinity described in the reality of Victorian men trying to criticize for many readers.

In this research, the writer tries to reveal how the live of Victorian society constructs the concept of masculinity itself and how the society determines the quality of men as happen at the period. Analyzing the characters in Wilde's work shows how the expectations of society effects the character's behaviour and their reactions to society's deals. The ideals of Victorian men include several things, such as brave, intelligent, physically strong, emotionally independent, financially responsible, moral, independent, and somewhat rugged and untamed (Morgan, 1992: 147).

Finally, all these qualities had to come together for the protection of women in order for a man to be truly fulfilled and have worth in Victorian society. Therefore, in finding those qualities of masculinity through manly character, the writer applies Connell's theory of masculinity in his book *Masculinities* published 1999. Those of qualities are connected to the gender roles that are socially determined behaviors, normative, and responsibilities. So, this theory can answer the research problems that is found by the writer through the play of Oscar Wilde, as below:

1.2 Research Question

Based on the description above, the writer formulates the research question into:
How is Ernest portrayed as the ideal of Victorian masculinity in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*?

1.3 Research Objective

In accordance with the research problem that has formulated above, finally this research aims to know the ideal of Victorian masculinity portrayed Ernest as minor character taking a big influence to the increasing of conflict in the plot of the Oscar's play "*The Importance of Being Earnest*".

1.4 Uses of the Study

1.4.1 Theoretical Uses

Theoretically, in discussing about this issue, this study will provide additional information and knowledge that will be useful and advantageous for readers about the ideals of masculinity in Victorian period as portrayed through character made in literary works. Therefore, it can help readers to recognize the conflicts that are caused by different views or perspectives made by society in such region.

1.4.2 Practical Uses

Practically, the writer expects that this research can help readers to understand the view of Victorian masculinity that dominantly constructed by social, culture and the circumstances of economy, which is the view of masculinity itself cannot be separated from gender roles such as responsibilities, physics, etc. And then, this research hopefully can be used as the future reference for other new researchers

who want to conduct similar topic as the present writer do in order to help them to find the way of analyzing of the ideal of masculinity reflected in literary works.

1.5 Scope of the Study

In this research, the writer narrows the discussion to minimize the time of arrangement of this paper into the analyzing of ideal of masculinity in Victorian period as portrayed in Ernest through the play of Oscar “*The Importance of Being Earnest*”. The writer focuses only to investigate name Ernest as male character used in the play, because the true qualities of the ideal of Victorian masculinity viewed him by the author, which is here the author as the third person point of view. Character and characterization will help the writer to find what truly especially the ideal of men as expected by the Victorian society thus it makes the construction of what the concept of masculinity in the Victorian period.