



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***RESISTANCE OF STEREOTYPED GENDER PERFORMANCE IN
SELECTED SHORT STORIES IN ENGLISH BY CONTEMPORARY
MALAYSIAN WRITERS***

NURUL SOLEHA BINTI MOHD NOOR

FBMK 2017 55



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By

NURUL SOLEHA BINTI MOHD NOOR

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Arts**

August 2017

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Arts

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Existing studies had shown that identity issues particularly on gender are still apparent in Malaysian English literature. By utilizing the concepts of 'gender performance' and 'performativity' introduced by Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), this study aims to expose that there is an act of resistance among new generations/contemporary Malaysian writers in English against gender stereotyped norms. This is done through the construction of their characters' 'troubled' gender identity in their short stories. *25 Malaysian Short Stories: Best of Silverfish New Writing 2001 – 2005* was chosen as the scope of the study to meet the objectives of (a) to identify psychological and sociological stereotyped 'gender performance' of the characters in the selected short stories collection, and (b) to examine how contemporary Malaysian writers in English perform 'gender trouble' through 'gender performativity' in their writings. The study found that there are two types of gender repression portrayed in the selected short stories. They are; (a) the internal gender repression which includes the expectations on the characters to fit into gender and social roles and also (b) external gender repression which are the pressure placed on the characters to fit into certain social statuses. Contemporary Malaysian writers in English are seen as 'gender troubled' through the representation of their characters' 'gender performativity' in the narration. Based on the results of this study, it is hoped that the misconceptions on gender and the conventional way of thinking about gender in Malaysian society can be somewhat liberated.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**KAJIAN PENENTANGAN TERHADAP STEREOTAIP GENDER
PERFORMANCE DI DALAM CERPEN TERPILIH OLEH PENULIS
KONTEMPORARI MALAYSIA DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS**

Oleh

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Ogos 2017

**Pengerusi: Prof. Madya Arbaayah Ali Termizi, PhD
Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi**

Kajian sedia ada menunjukkan bahawa isu-isu identiti terutamanya isu *gender* masih diketengahkan di dalam kesusasteraan Inggeris Malaysia. Dengan menggunakan konsep '*gender performance*' dan '*performativity*' yang diperkenalkan oleh Judith Butler di dalam bukunya *Gender Trouble* (1990), kajian ini bertujuan untuk mendedahkan tindakan penentangan di kalangan penulis kontemporari Malaysia dalam Bahasa Inggeris terhadap stereotaip *gender*. Penentangan ini dapat dilihat melalui pembinaan identiti watak di dalam cerpen mereka yang bersifat '*gender trouble*'. *25 Malaysian Short Stories: Best of Silverfish New Writing 2001-2005* dipilih sebagai skop kajian bagi memenuhi dua objektif utama; (a) untuk mengenal pasti stereotaip '*gender performance*' dari segi aspek psikologi dan sosiologi watak di dalam koleksi cerpen yang dipilih, dan (b) untuk mengkaji bagaimana penulis kontemporari Malaysia dalam Bahasa Inggeris melaksanakan '*gender trouble*' melalui '*gender performativity*' di dalam penulisan mereka. Kajian mendapati bahawa terdapat dua jenis penindasan *gender* yang digambarkan di dalam cerpen ini iaitu; (a) penindasan *gender* dalaman yang merangkumi jangkaan pada watak-watak untuk memenuhi peranan sosial juga *gender* dan (b) penindasan *gender* luaran yang dikenakan ke atas watak untuk memenuhi status sosial tertentu. Penulis kontemporari Malaysia dalam Bahasa Inggeris dilihat sebagai '*gender troubled*' melalui perwakilan '*gender performativity*' watak mereka. Berdasarkan hasil kajian ini, adalah diharapkan bahawa pemahaman dan pemikiran konvensional mengenai *gender* di kalangan masyarakat Malaysia mampu diubah.

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From Allah we came and to Him we returned

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*There's a small town in this country where no one ever grows old
There's a season to call for this country that is not seasonal
There's a road that will not end even in death
There's a deep hatred in someone for being kind
They are your mind, your heart, your memory, and your goodbye
With these, you are eternal*

-Nurul Soleha Mohd Noor, 22nd March 2017

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Declaration by graduate student

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This is to confirm that:

- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The first chapter intends to facilitate information on how the current study is to be conducted and to generalize the whole idea of the research in terms of its relevance to the field of English literature especially to the Malaysian literature in English. It also provides an avenue for understanding of significant terms and concepts used in the course of the study. It addresses the research gap in the context of gender identity presented in Malaysian literature in English along with the significance of the study to be carried out.

1.2 Background of Research

In accordance to their times, there are three generations of Malaysian writers in English as stated by Chin in a book chapter entitled *New Generations Writings in English: Discursive Conditions and Literary Revival in Malaysia, 1996-2005* (2007). They include; (a) the pioneers, (b) the post-independence writers, and (c) the new generation writers (*New Generation Writings in English* 262). The pioneers are among the first representations of Malaysian voice. They concentrated on the historical events of their times such as the Japanese occupation and the resistance against the British colonization (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 262). As for the post-independence writers, they mostly wrote about the sociopolitical change in the postcolonial era. They are more concerned on the racial and lingual issues in Malaysia at the time (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 262-263) due to the multiracial society of the country. Unfortunately, despite the growing tradition of Malaysian writings in English in the postcolonial era, it became a dying tradition from 1970s to 1980s due to the implementation of Malay Language as the National Language and also the displacement felt by non-Malay writers in English (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 264-265).

It is only until the late 19th century that the new generation of writers made their appearance. This was the period when Malaysia is still economically and politically stable. They consequently represent the trends of their times, especially the modernizing aspects of the country (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 263). English literature in Malaysia was more prominent in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century where most of the writers are more interested in writing prose fiction due to their involvement in politics and social life (Holden 61-62). The new generation of writers revived the dying tradition of established writers in making their voices heard by coming out with new literary ideas, themes and styles (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 269). Wignesan stated that in order for Malaysians to deal with

multicultural and multilingual challenges in Malaysia, English became the most appropriate language to use in conveying the right message in their stories (77). The current study will focus its attention on the new generation of writers and their short stories in English. This is because through this literary representation, it offers a way for readers to deconstruct the issues and concerns at hand since literature stands for a creative representation of a country's development at a specific time in history (Raihanah, *New Writings in Malaysia* 61). The new generation writers will also be regarded as contemporary Malaysian writers in English in this study onward.

According to Chin, much of the credit for the beginning of writing in English activities goes to the *NST-Shell Short Story Competition* that ran through 1989 to 1992 (*New Generation Writings in English* 269). This tradition is carried on in early 1990s by Skoob Books Publications through "*Contemporary Writings of the Pacific Rim*" series of literary and non-literary English Language Writings (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 270). However, *In Blue Silk Girdle: Stories from Malaysia and Singapore* was the only anthology of short stories made in the first half of the decade (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 272). But the tradition didn't stop there. The continuation of this short stories writing tradition is carried a step further by Silverfishbooks as it published short stories in annual series namely the *Silverfish New Writing*.

Silverfishbooks independent publishing house helped revive and sustain the short story writing tradition starting from the year 2000 through the publication of its annual anthology, *Silverfish New Writing*, which brought forward "new", never-before-published works of Malaysian unknown writers along with established writers (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 272-273). In an interview with Raman Krishnan, the *Silverfish New Writing* series producer, Raihanah quoted him saying that the main aim of the series was to provide Malaysians the opportunity to become owner of their own stories and to be able to represent Malaysian voice (*New Writings in Malaysia* 62). The series, for this reason, portrayed a 'collective Malaysian consciousness' concerning local writers' voice and literary persona addressing a range of issues such as the modernization of Malaysia, socio-cultural, economical, and political problems that are affecting people (Raihanah, *New Writings in Malaysia* 63). In addition, Chin listed other anthologies of short stories written by new and established writers compiled by academics apart from the Silverfish New Writing series. They include; (a) *The Merlion and the Hibiscus: Contemporary Short Stories from Singapore and Malaysia* (2002), (b) *Petals of Hibiscus: A Representative Anthology of Malaysian Literature in English* (2003), (c) *Insights: Malaysian Poems* (2003), and (d) *Spirit of the Keris: A Selection of Malaysian Short Stories & Poems* (2003) (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 273).

It is discovered that the contemporary writers in English in Malaysia mostly explored controversial issues such as race and religion rather than the political issues that the previous generations of writers had written about (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 277). This is done despite of where Malaysian writers are psychologically affected by the repressive methods they had to take

in writing. This is due to the tight censorial structures regarding sensitive issues of race and religion that had caused fear among them (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 279) to write freely about what they genuinely think and feel. Other than that, these contemporary writers also explored recurring issues such as cultural, gender, racial, and identity issues which had previously been explored by the post-independence writers (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 276). On the side note, some Malaysian women writers explored women's issues in their writings such as motherhood, career, domestic violence, rape and female sexuality as well (Chin, *New Generation Writings in English* 276) which are also among the tabooed and controversial issues to be discussed. In *25 Malaysian Short Stories: Best of Silverfish New Writing 2001 – 2005* (2006), which is the final anthology from the *Silverfish New Writing* series, it is uncovered that the short stories collectively engaged readers in various issues of identity formation and complexities through numerous evidences of literary representation of personal script by using first person point of view style of writing (Raihanah, *New Writings in Malaysia* 64). Consequently, the personal Malaysian voices are represented in literature through the personal script from the anthology written by the authors in order to display the individuality (identity) of their protagonists (Raihanah, *New Writings in Malaysia* 65). As mentioned by Gauntlett, nothing within our identity is fixed since identity is the product of repetitive social and cultural discourses. Thus, traditional views of masculinity and femininity should be challenged because gender, like identity, is under the impression of a mere 'performance' (135). Accordingly, writings (literature) are influenced by gender and social construction of traditional 'norms' that had been set by society for both male and female (Goodman 72).

Ryan stated in his book on gender studies literary theory that instead of biological differences of female and male, gender norms were imposed on people by culture and also religion as a political agenda to separate men and women (133). This shows that rather than deciding freely on who we *are*, we are taught on who we *should be* instead. What constitutes 'men' and 'women' had been passed down to people from generation to generation. Feminists argued that this is an ideology presented by the patriarchal society. However, Connell stated in his book; *Masculinities* (2005) that men are equally oppressed as women and that there is no existence of "hierarchy of oppression" (24) such as patriarchy. This suggests that both men and women are oppressed by the gender roles that are assigned to them since the beginning of civilization by numerous kinds of ideologies. Just as Butler had quoted the Lacanian theory of religion in her philosophical book *Gender Trouble* (1990) where religion had demanded people to perform normative sexuality (heterosexual sexual practice) or acceptable impulses of their gender and sexuality (*Gender Trouble* 76-77). People are, then, ordered to behave in accordance to their gender norms through repetitive ideologies and this behavior does not define their true identity. This is because these ideologies commonly contain false sets of beliefs to merely secure the places of certain individuals or groups (Hogan, 28). It will thus cause people to become confused of their personal interests and of what is ethical in regards to their actions (Hogan, 29).

According to Connell, in line with Freud's hypothesis of unconscious desires, humans are "constitutionally bisexual" and that masculinity and femininity existed in each individual (9). The unconscious part of the psyche is where the deep innate desires lie hidden. They comprises of unacceptable sexual desires, immoral urges, and irrational wishes. Not to mention, the unconscious also reacts to the libido where the primary sexual desires laid innate. Therefore, what is feminine or masculine about individuals are just what the formalized formation had imposed on them. This formalized formation is related to the morality beliefs and also religious beliefs that had primarily allocated behaviors in which individuals should act upon according to their biological structures of men or women.

In order to find out what is actually hidden in the unconscious, the hidden desires and thoughts of people living in Malaysia relating to gender, one ought to look into the writings produced by Malaysian writers itself. In Freud's ego-defense mechanism, there's one way of coping with unacceptable impulses by directing it through other methods that are acceptable called 'sublimation'. For example, people will write to direct their deepest unacceptable desires and thoughts on a piece of paper as it seems to be more acceptable only in writings rather than actually speaking or acting it out (Mijolla-Mellar 1678).

Ryan mentioned Derrida's ideas on metaphysics in his book on *Literary Theory* (2007) that writing represents a mental speech of a person in an absence of identity (66) which indicates that in place of speaking out an opinion, we sublime the thoughts we have in our head by writing them down instead. In that way, the meaning behind what we really think can be better presented and expressed. Therefore, when it comes to literature, gender stereotyping is most possibly embedded in writings as a mental speech or signage of gender stereotyped perceptions of real people in real life.

Evidently, gender stereotype in literature is an issue that needs to be looked into. This is because gender stereotyping in literature embodies the minds of people who wrote them as their mental speech. Literature can be used as a tool of suggestion to influence people who read them. This is in accordance to what was previously stated of Derrida's idea on metaphysics that "writing is a sign of mental speech and that mental speech itself is a sign of an idea" (Ryan 66). This indicates that written work presented the very ideas or ideals of the person who had written it and they can be used as a platform for influence.

Moreover, someone can develop their sex-based identity and social relationships through reading (Brugilles et al. 33). Not only that, how people treat each other in the literature reflects the present reality of the society's culture (Kathiraveloo 15). It is apparent that stereotypes have some effects on our perceptions and communications based on the social world presented in the literature (Kathiraveloo 33). Thus, people will socialize with each other based on the norms that they have learnt through reading. If the literature that they read are highlighting on gender stereotyping norms, it is possible that the

way they socialize with each other will also lead to stereotyping in accordance to what they have read.

Connell had written his text, *Masculinities* (2005) to meet five purposes; (a) to trace the history of modern Western investigation of masculinity, (b) to present a theory of masculinities, embedded in a social theory of gender, (c) to describe the lines of four groups of men caught up in processes of change, (d) to synthesize the history of Western masculinities and their political expressions, and (e) to propose strategies for the politics of gender equality (xi). In fulfilling the first purpose of the book, Connell found that “one contingent style of sexuality – reproductive heterosexuality – becomes naturalized through constant repetition and rote learning” (134). ‘Reproductive heterosexuality’ is also known as ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ or ‘heteronormativity’ which carries the meaning of normal heterosexual sexual practices. This supposedly normalized sexual practice suggests that, as gender perceptions are imposed on people from time to time, they begin to repeat the cycle all over again on how a certain gender should behave. It became an act of mimicry instead for people in figuring out for themselves of their own capabilities as men and women. Literature could lead people toward this cycle as what is written is also a way to impose certain beliefs on readers as what the theory of metaphysics had suggested. Connell even quoted Baudrillard’s idea on ‘hyperreality’ in his book where media could play the role as the perfect imitation of reality. Hereby, the ‘real’ can be shaped by economic, political, and cultural power. This means that unreality produced by these powers can be assumed as a reality as it was shaped by the imitation of what is ‘real’. This makes media a powerful tool (69). Hence, media, even in the form of literature, can be regarded as a tool of influence on what is ‘real’. In a sense, people have a fixed biological sex as male or female. Later on, gender perception is embedded in their minds by their culture. This embedded belief about gender is a mere ideology supported by the media (i.e. literature) which is performed repetitively (by both male and female). This means that gender perception that they thought were ‘real’ is nothing more than just a ‘hyperreality’ (Gauntlett 139-140). Through gender stereotype in written literature, then, sex typing and gender typing ideologies produced ‘hyperreality’ of gender. But can stereotyping of gender be subverted as well in the sublimed form of literature instead of simply reflecting social attitudes people have towards gender?

1.3 Research Problem

Rashti stated that; “stereotypes may have some basis in reality and may help us to understand our social world better, but they may not be accurate descriptions of particular individuals. Nevertheless, stereotypes affect our perceptions and consequently our communication with others” (33). Thus, gender stereotyping in literature could somewhat be a reflection on the society’s attitudes toward gender. To determine the reflection of the society’s gender perception, it is therefore necessary to look at previous studies done on gender issues in the literature.

Existing studies had found a few gender issues related to Malaysian written literature in English. One of the gender issues in Malaysian literature in English is the misconception of female identity as experienced by female characters. One study found that women in Malaysia are prone to become objects of misconceptions as they are struggling in search of their identity (Johari 168). They are also 'muted' and are expected to sacrifice for men (Rashti 243). Another study found that by dramatizations of female identity in literature, it is proven how male ideology had influenced society and that "subjects are the product of signs, or signifiers, which make up our ideas of identity, that is, subjects are constructed, hence provisional, shifting, changing, always able to be redefined or reconstructed" (Wan Yahya 95). Therefore, gender identity is not fixed. It can always be performed differently than what had been decided by the traditional view of male and female. Omar & Che Dan shown that "much of the contestations in relation to gender are concentrated on women's body / sexuality" (50). It appears that women are more seen as sexual objects rather than a human being. In a study of Llyod Fernando's novel alone, it is found that the male characters from the novel believed strongly in gender hierarchy and oppressed the female characters by treating them as 'others' (Quayum, *Imagining 'Bangsa Malaysia'* 32). Thus, females are mostly treated as inferior beings to males that in the process, leading them to be confused of their gender role as women.

Furthermore, women writers in Malaysia experienced censorship in terms of their freedom in expressing themselves as indicated by Chin in a study of *The Anxieties of Authorship in Malaysian and Singaporean Writings in English: Locating the English Language Writer and the Question of Freedom in the Postcolonial Era* (2006);

As an ideology, freedom will always be associated with the liberal ideal of the individual right, but the complex material realities encountered in the plural societies of Malaysia and Singapore have complicated this ideal. Freedom emerges as a discursive product that has to be negotiated from the boundaries in place, be it social, cultural or even political contexts. Furthermore, the different ways in which writers react and respond depend not only on individual experiences of time and space, but also on personal desires and notions of identity and selfhood. (Chin, *The Anxieties of Authorship* 20)

The ideologies that had been influencing Malaysian had made women writers tend to censor their writings to avoid voicing their opinion on sensitive issues such as race, gender and religion. In another study by Chin, *Expressions of Self-censorship: Ambivalence and Difference in Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese Women's Prose Writings in English* (2006), it is found that "cultural indoctrination of one's gendered place and role in the family hierarchy, are still very much in evidence" (Chin, *Expressions of Self-censorship* 23) and that the women writers are not being straightforward with resisting their stand in the society but being rather ambivalent about it through their writings (Chin, *Expressions of Self-censorship* 26). It is then proven that gender issues in

women's writings are present but are sublimated in ways adaptable to the society's restrictions on the freedom of expressions.

Another issue is the power of patriarchy presented in the literature. Quayum, in his paper *Interrogating Malaysian Literature in English: Its Glories, Sorrows and Thematic Trends* (2008), stated that the Malaysian Literature in English collectively portrayed gender hierarchy and merciless victimization of women in the literature (Quayum, *Interrogating Malaysian Literature in English* 159). Other than that, Omar & Che Dan showcased that women conformed to patriarchy's division of power (49). Meanwhile, Mohd Zain found that married Indian women, on the outside, are still accepting rather than resisting the male patriarchal society expectations on them though they are actually resisting in a subliminal way (49-50) through the study on K. S. Maniam's short stories. Hashim et al., on the other hand, found that despite women's success in educational and professional fields, they are still suffering from various kinds of alienation due to the patriarchal ideals in Malaysia (*Literary Realities of Malaysian Women* 395-396). It is reflected here that gender had been set into the binary opposition of superiority (male) and inferiority (female) through patriarchy in the written literary representation.

Other than that, gender issues are also transparent in educational literary texts. Chin reported that there has been an integration of literature component into English curriculum for secondary level and local authors' works had been a part of the literature instilled in the syllabus (*New Generation Writings in English* 268). It is important to highlight this matter since school students who are mostly in the age of 12 to 18 are still looking for an identity to conform to (Santrock 75). Hence, gender perceptions presented in educational literary texts used in school may influence the shaping of their identity (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem 157). Mukundan & Nimehchisalem also found that English textbooks in Malaysia misrepresented gender with male characters outnumbering female characters, female characters being timid, and male characters being aggressive (168). Liew, meanwhile, revealed that the portrayal of characters in primary school textbooks are still dominated by male and the female characters were not presented equally in terms of gender roles (202). It is exposed, then, that the stereotyping of gender is present in Malaysian literature including educational literary texts.

Other than that, Khoo, in a book of his own essays collection *Reclaiming Adat: Contemporary Malaysian Film and Literature* (2006) found that; "those in the culture industry will likely continue to test the limits of liberalism, whether by consciously or unconsciously reclaiming *adat* or by dealing with sexual matters openly in literary and cinematic discourses" (*Reclaiming Adat* 155). This means that stereotyping of gender will likely to continue in the Malaysian scene in literature and film due to the cultural influence on individuals' sexuality. This is supported by Marina Mahathir's critique on Malaysian novels in her book *Dancing On Thin Ice* (2015) that the popular local novels focuses on how a good woman is "one who obeys her man, regardless of how unjust he may be

to her” since the men had always been considered to be more superior to women by the religion in Malay culture (137).

It was seen that past studies mostly focused on the stereotype and oppression of characters in literature. This study, however, will concentrate on how characters perform resistance towards gender stereotyped norms that had been imposed on them. This will be done by looking at the psychological and sociological ideologies and discourses of gender in the characters from the selected short stories through Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) concepts; 'gender performance', 'gender performativity', and 'gender trouble'.

1.4 Purpose of Study

The current study intends to look at the resistance of stereotyped 'gender performance' in Malaysian literature in English. This will be done by comparing the contemporary writings of Malaysian writers from a collection of short stories by one of the Malaysian publishing companies which is Silverfish. These stories will be analyzed using the concepts presented by Judith Butler which are 'gender performance', 'gender performativity', and 'gender trouble' in order to see how gender stereotyped norms are being resisted.

1.5 Conceptual Theory

The study utilizes gender studies as base of its conceptual theory. As other theorists and philosophers had done, Butler also questions gender identity as a constructed identity formed by the society and culture. But most of what the other theorists and philosophers alike are arguing is on the denial and dismissal of homosexual identity compared to a heterosexual one. Butler's work in 1990 is different in a sense where she presented the idea of resistance towards all identities that had been constructed by the society and thus provides an avenue for heterosexual identity to be subverted as well through her idea of 'gender trouble'. Hence, the book by Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) is deemed as the most suitable for the study as it dwells deep into the idea of resistance.

Judith Butler published her text, *Gender Trouble*, in 1990 through Routledge book series; *Thinking Gender*. According to her, the book was written to present the collective struggle of sexual identity as part of the cultural life (*Gender Trouble* xxviii). She presented the concepts of 'gender performance' and 'performativity' to explain this sexual identity struggle.

'Gender performance' is a creation of norm by cultural fiction that obliges people to perform gender in the belief that it is natural and necessary. With that, punishment awaits for those who did not perform their gender accordingly (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 190). This is supported by Castle's explanation of

'gender performance' as; the social norms and mystification of sexual identity. And that gender was formed through the ideals of philosophy, religion, psychology, medicine, and popular culture (104). In this study, it is conclusive to say that 'gender performance' is what the ideologies assigned to people on what constitutes as gender. Whereby, this means that the female and male gender roles are merely the products of this very concept of 'gender performance'.

'Gender performativity', on the other hand, is how we carry out the norms that had been created by this cultural fiction. It is a constructed identity where the people who had come to believe the norms chose to perform them in the mode of the belief (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 192). As elaborated by Ryan, 'performativity' is the repetitive imitation of the normal gender standards of 'performance' (135). This indicates that how people carry out the 'performance' of gender is their 'performativity' of gender. It is the gender discourses of the people in performing the gender norms that had been assigned to them as their beliefs system.

According to Butler, the book was written as an effort to replace and challenge the traditional beliefs of gender by performing 'gender trouble'. This is to rectify the misrepresentations of gender identity that had been repetitively imposed by the norms of compulsory heterosexuality (*Gender Trouble* 46). Hence, 'gender trouble' is a method that can be used to resist gender stereotyped norms. By troubling gender, people can choose not to repeat gender norms (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 202-203) and this will make way for a better representation of gender identity rather than the traditionally imposed identity.

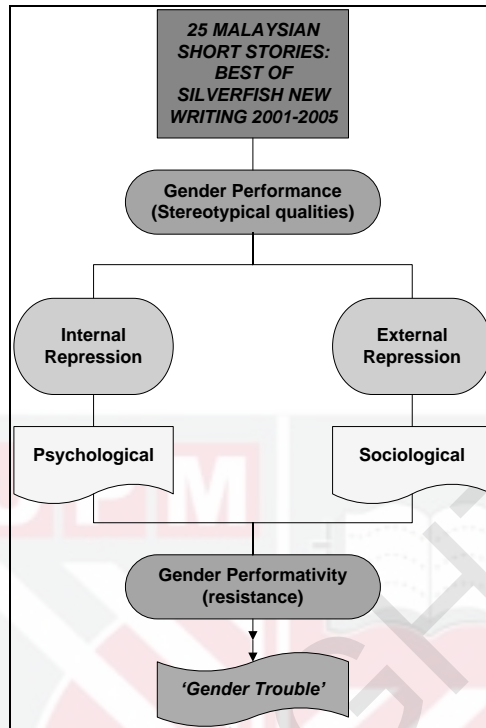


Figure 1: The Stereotyped 'Gender Performance' Resistance Flow Chart

As depicted in Figure 1, stereotypical qualities of males and females as regulated by the society are apparently seen as 'gender performance' of the characters from the collection. They are required to adhere to these ideologies of gender in accordance to their biological sex. There are two types of 'gender performance' experienced by them where they are repressed on two parts. The first one is through internal repression where they had internalized the stereotypical qualities into their psychological make-up to necessitate their submission to them. Secondly, it is the external repression imposed on them by others in a society that regulates their decision and action in accordance to their genders in return for approval and acceptance. The characters are resisting these repressions placed on them through their various forms of 'gender performativity' where they do not repeat the hierarchical gendered norms or stereotypical qualities of gender as desired by the society and also by disfiguring their 'performance' of adhering to the stereotypes. Through this resistance, they are, hence, 'gender troubled'.

To reiterate, the concept of 'gender performance' is in relation to the ideologies of gender which are psychologically and sociologically experienced by the characters in the short stories collection. Meanwhile, the concept of 'gender performativity' is the discourses of gender through the characters' actions and conversations. The psychological 'gender performance' experienced by the characters is read as their internal repression on their individual forbidden desires. On the other hand, the sociological 'gender performance' is the

external repression that they had to go through due to the gender norms that society had imposed on them. It is hypothesized that in resisting the norms, the characters had performed 'gender trouble' through their 'performativity' of gender.

1.6 Research Objectives

1. To identify psychological and sociological stereotyped 'gender performance' of the characters in selected short stories from the collection *25 Malaysian Short Stories: Best of Silverfish New Writing 2001-2005*.
2. To examine how contemporary Malaysian writers in English performed 'gender trouble' through 'gender performativity' in their writings.

1.7 Research Questions

1. What are the psychological and sociological stereotyped 'gender performance' of the characters in selected short stories from the collection *25 Malaysian Short Stories: Best of Silverfish New Writing 2001-2005*?
2. How do these contemporary Malaysian writers in English perform 'gender trouble' through 'gender performativity' in their writings? There should be at least two subheadings to justify having subheadings.

1.8 Scope and Limitation

The collection chosen for the present study is *25 Malaysian Short Stories: Best of Silverfish New Writing 2001 – 2005*. It was published in 2006 by Silverfish as the last book of the Silverfish New Writing series. This collection was chosen because it compiled short stories written by contemporary Malaysian writers in English between the year 2001 to 2005. So, the stories represent current issues and events ("Contemporary") in the 21st century Malaysia. This collection compiles selected short stories from all of the previous 9 books from the *Silverfish New Writing* series from 2001 to 2005. They were compiled based on the readers' and editors' choice;

Collectively the 25 short stories appear to utilise a strong sense of personal script. There are numerous evidences of literary representation of personhood in these stories. Many of the stories utilise the first person narration which presents a good opportunity to exhibit the character's sense of self. (Raihanah, *New Writings in Malaysia* 64)

However, there are limitations to the study since the only concepts used for the study are Judith Butler's 'gender performance', 'gender performativity', and 'gender trouble'. Hence, the concept 'gender parody' which was also presented in *Gender Trouble* (1990) by Judith Butler will not be focused on in the current

study. This is because the concept was used as a form of imitating the supposedly natural gender identity as a “failed copy” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 200) as in the practices of drag and thus, is not applicable as a method to prove resistance since the characters chosen in the collection are characters that do not practice drag or homosexuality and they are not transgender or transsexual.

1.9 Significance of Study

Existing studies had proven that gender stereotyping still embodies the English written literature in Malaysia. The current study, therefore, will shift its focus to prove that there is an act of resistance from the Malaysian writers against the norms of gendered identity by performing ‘gender trouble’ through the construction of their characters.

As to the stereotyping of gender in written literature, there is a possibility that this stereotyping may compel the construction of gender identity of readers. This is because identity is potentially obtained through the readers association with the gendered discourses in written literature (Litosseliti & Sunderland 224). Nonetheless, how the readers interpret literature may vary and thus cannot be predicted. Their identities might be shaped by the discourses in the written literature or the interpretation might be shaped by their identities instead (Litosseliti & Sunderland 225).

According to Cook, written language has the ability to allow an individual to withdraw oneself from social interaction and thus provides greater freedom for the individual to experience what had been read (190). Therefore, the written works of these writers can be used as a platform to see how they express their resistance on the gender stereotyped norms that had been freely assigned to them. Regardless, it is known that written literature which defies the norms tend not to be overly accepted by the society since the norms are “defined, not for specific readers, but for –and by –a dominant social group speaking in institutions at a particular time in history” (Cook 194). By looking at the resistance of these writers, then, will enable us to see how the norms are arguable and even questionable.

Butler had frequently theorized how gender is ‘performative’ and that there is no pre-existing gender identity before the compulsion of imposed gender ideologies. Gender reality is only constructed through sustained repetitive social ‘performances’. Therefore, it is possible for people to perform differently than the imposed norms of the compulsory heterosexuality (*Gender Trouble* 192) by performing ‘gender trouble’. Numerous studies have been done by utilizing the concepts on queer texts and integrated into feminist studies on literature. The current study however focuses on characters that practice normative sexuality rather than homosexual or sexually divergent characters. By examining characters’ resistance in the writings by Malaysian writers in English, it will help change the common gender stereotypical beliefs in people

as well. As stated by Hogan, the belief is the culprit rather than word and changing the word may help changing the belief (102). Hence, what is written in the literature may help changing the misconceptions on gender that have been persisting in our society. Through the resistance of stereotyped 'gender performance' of these writers, the need to change the conventional way of thinking about gender will be enlightened.

1.10 Definition of Terms

Gender is what makes a 'male' and 'female' through the product of 'culturally constructed' beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes of societies (Goodman vii). It is a much fluid category as it can be distinguished by a set of psychological features and role attributes that society had placed on 'male' and 'female' (Helgeson 3). Therefore, **gender** is the typical roles assigned to men and women by societies. To differentiate between **gender** and **sex**, as stated by Launius and Hassel, **gender** is the characteristics of behaviors that may change or evolve and this had strongly been associated to the criteria of 'feminine' and 'masculine'. Meanwhile, **sex** is the "biological, genetic, and physiological features of males and females" (27).

On the other hand, **sexuality**, as defined by Foucault, is the practice of sex and its pleasures in accordance to certain ideological standards set by the society (*History of Sexuality* 68). Aside from that, it is simply defined as sexual behaviors or sexual preferences by Ng, Mohamad, and Tan (131). Hence, **sexuality** can be defined as sexual practices conducted by individuals according to their sexual preferences. Though sexuality is seen by Foucault as a cultural construction produced by the power of society (*History of Sexuality* 147), individuals practice their sexuality freely regardless on the account of it being acceptable or unacceptable by society.

Femininity involves the traits, behaviors, and interests that are assigned to the female gender role while **masculinity** is the opposite to the assignment of those categories to the male gender role (Helgeson 4). According to Gauntlett, "**masculinity** is seen as the state of 'being a man', which is currently somewhat in flux. **Femininity**, on the other hand, is not necessarily seen as the state of 'being a woman', instead, it's perceived more as a stereotype of a woman's role from the past" (9-10). So, the idea of what is **feminine** and what is **masculine** rests on how the role of being female and male is carried out by both genders in a society.

Sex-typing is the process of acquiring sex-appropriate behaviors, preferences, skills, and self concept (Helgeson 6) while **gender-role stereotype** is the cognitive part of someone's attitude towards a certain gender (Helgeson 7). Thus, they both refer to people's beliefs and attitudes toward a particular sex and gender. These beliefs and attitudes can either be positive or negative.

'**Performance**', as explained by Butler, is the gender reality constructed through social norms on what is essential of sexual and gendered identity (*Gender Trouble* 192) while '**performativity**' troubles these norms through transformed fashion of various discourses (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 201). Thus, '**performance**' can be considered as a subject and '**performativity**' is the very beliefs about the subject (Castle 104). In other words, '**performance**' is the very subject of ideologies and '**performativity**' is the discourses to the ideologies. These were the two terms introduced by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*;

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 34).

'**Gender trouble**' is a method suggested by Butler in order to resist gender stereotyped norms that had repetitively compelled people to behave from generation to generation. According to Butler, "**Gender Trouble** sometimes reads as if gender is simply a self-invention or that the psychic meaning of a gendered presentation might be read directly off its surface. Both of those postulates have had to be refined over time (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxvi)." Therefore, to resist the traditional gender identity, people would perform '**gender trouble**' and gain new gender identity.

Resistance, in the understanding of the current study, means going against the gender identity that had been regulated by the society in keeping gender in its' binary form. According to Butler, this **resistance** is also possible to be conducted in the very process of repeating 'gender performance' within the hierarchical laws of its binarism (*Gender Trouble* 198-199). This is in agreement to Foucault's idea of **resistance** that "[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this **resistance** is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*History of Sexuality* 95) which means that to resist the power, **resistance** must be carried out from within its' law. Hence, through 'troubling' these laws.

1.11 Summary

To conclude, the current study is conducted on the purpose to show resistance performed by contemporary Malaysian writers in English in the construction of their characters' identity against imposed gender stereotypical norms. This is done through the utilization of the concept 'gender performance', 'gender performativity', and 'gender trouble' by Judith Butler from her 1990's text *Gender Trouble*. This study is done in hope that the traditional way of thinking and performing gender in Malaysian society can be reconstructed and deconstructed in order to promote the possibilities of a fluid gender identity. The next chapter of this thesis will showcase previous studies that had been done by scholars to further strengthen the significance of the current study.

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