

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, the research questions, purpose of the research, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, the research methodology, data collection and analysis, the clarification of terms, and the organization of the paper.

#### 1.1 Background of the study

A woman's role is an important role in society, especially in a family. A woman can do many roles, such as a caretaker, a cook, or even a teacher for her children. Unfortunately, many people assume that a woman's role is not as important as man. Regarding this, Beauvoir (1953, as cited in Bressler, 2007), for example, states that women are often seen as the "other". This means that many people tend to consider women as secondary to men, while men are the "one". Furthermore, Beauvoir (1953, as cited in Selden, 1993) states that women have been "made" inferior, and the oppression has been compounded by men's belief that women are inferior by nature.

The inferiority of women is an issue which is potential to be analyzed because women are often seen to be the second class citizen in the society and family life (Emecheta, 1979). A simple example of the inferiority of women can be seen in the relations between a husband and a wife in a family. According to Ingleheart and Noris (2003), in a family, authority is established through male's domination because societies are characterized by differentiated gender roles that discourage women from working outside the home. Furthermore, Wearing (1996, as cited in Collis, 1999) states that in the family which at least consists of a husband and a wife, the husband has more power than his wife because of his gender where his traditional position as the head of the household makes him more powerful. Women's inferiority is not only reflected in social or family life, but can also be seen in literary works. Johnson (2004), for example, has shown how women in *The handmaid's tale* (1985) are depicted as powerless characters. In his study, he shows that women's characters in the novel are constructed as dependent on men and are not empowering in any way. In short, women are not only placed in the second class in social

structures, but they are also constructed in the same ways, drawing on the same stereotypes, in literary works.

The inferiority of women is one concern of feminist movement. The inferiority of women can be seen when people talk about men as the superior and women as the opposite, as if they are lacking in everything. This idea is in line with the argument of Simone de Beauvoir, a prominent feminist figure, (1949, as cited in Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004), who states that women are believed as subordinate to men in society and that they are seen as “lack”. Despite this popular notion, there are some writers who disagree with the above idea, and Helena Cixous is one of them. Cixous (1976) in her essay *The laugh of the Medusa* refuses the idea that women are considered as “lack”. She, instead, invites women to write about themselves. This idea is referred to as *Ecriture Feminine*. Through this idea, Cixous makes binary opposition between men and women to show the differences between men’s perspectives and women’s perspectives in writings. Her analysis (1976) shows that women are also able to create their own identities by writing a piece of literary work and putting their own perspectives about themselves in it through their language. With this perspective, Cixous believes that people will not see women as powerless and weak creatures anymore, but they can also see women as powerful characters in their own ways.

In seeing women as powerful characters in literary works, Cixous (1981) states that power can be divided into two forms: a power over others and a power over oneself. These forms of power can be found in literary works if female writers use their language and body in creating perspectives about women’s characters. Unfortunately, there are some female writers who hide their real identity and uses male’s perspective in seeing women as the characters in their writings because male’s writing style tends to be more welcomed by the society. Some of female writers even use male names as their pen names in order to make their writings welcomed, such as Charlotte Bronte with her pen name, Currer Bell, and Nora Roberts with her pen name, J.D.Robb.

To date, there seems to have not been sufficient studies showing that women have power in real life and literary works. One study that has attempted to show women’s power in real life is that of Coughlin, et al.’s (2005). In their research, they found seven forms of power which can support women to have business strategies and to have an ability to become a leader. These forms of power involve intuition, mental flexibility, long-term planning, creativity, imagination

and also verbal and social skills. With these forms of power, women are believed to be able to be the head in business matters and other aspects of life. Another example of a similar study in literary works is that of Hossain's (2004), who analyzes two novels. The analysis shows female characters as having self power and self identity against the male dominated world. Hossain's analysis also indicates that women can have power in their own ways. More studies in this area are needed to strengthen the findings regarding women's power. One other literary work which discusses about women and their power is a book written by Mc.Hugh (2006). This book is a collection of 13 short stories, but only three of them are chosen to be analyzed in this research paper. The reason the writer chooses these three short stories is because in these stories all the main characters are women, and each of them is depicted to have power in the family. These stories also involve issues surrounding family life. The titles of the three short stories are *The Lincoln Train*, *Oversite* and *Presence*. Forms of women's power found in the three stories are analyzed using a feminist perspective, particularly that drawn on the works of Helena Cixous. The writer chooses Cixous' concept of power because she foregrounds her ideas about power based on writings written by female's writers who intend to create their own identities. Her ideas of feminine writings show that women can also have power in various aspects of life. Furthermore, different from some other feminists who mainly struggle for women's rights and who often blame men for women's inferior conditions, Cixous does her fight without degrading men; instead, she shows that both genders have power in different ways and through her concept, Cixous also try to show that power can be used not to dominate others, but to give the different perspectives of women in which most of the literature studies did not show it directly.

## 1.2 The research questions

In order to achieve the purpose of the research, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What forms of women's power are represented in the three short stories viewed from a feminist perspective?
2. What do these forms of power signify?

### 1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purposes of the research are as to follow:

1. To investigate forms of women's power which are represented in three short stories viewed from a feminist perspective.
2. To investigate the significance of these forms of power.

### 1.4 Scope of the Research

The present research discusses how women's power is represented in terms of physical, behaviors, occupations, and traits in the three short stories. These three short stories are chosen from 13 short stories in *Mothers and other monsters* collection book. The first short story is *The Lincoln train* which has 10 pages in it, the second short story entitled *Oversite* is 8 pages long and the last, *Presence*, contains 18 pages. The primary reason why the writer chooses these three short stories is because they represent forms of women's power in the family, and only in these three short stories, women's roles are shown clearly, even though some of the characters analyzed are not the main characters in the story. To analyze the stories, a feminist perspective is used in this study in order to reveal the different forms of women's power that eventually create identities of women in feminine writings.

### 1.5 Significance of the Research

The present research is expected to provide significances as follows:

1. Theoretically, the research is expected to enrich theories of women's power in literary works, especially short stories.
2. Practically, it is expected that the use of gender roles and power from feminist perspective in the present research can provide guideline for future research which uses the same theories of analysis.

## 1.6 The Research Methodology

In conducting this research, the writer employs qualitative approach and descriptive method. By using qualitative method, the researcher collects the data by doing close reading, note taking, and then finding the textual evidences from the three short stories. The three short stories portray how woman's power affects other people in their society and family. The way they are represented is different from one short story to another, but they still have some similarities, such as how women's power is depicted in the family and how men's characters depend on them. The analysis on the three short stories is conducted in order to obtain a picture of how women's power is represented. In order to analyze the topic, the writer uses a feminist perspective from a French Feminist, Helena Cixous' concept of women's representation in feminine writings (1976).

## 1.7 Data Collection

The data are collected in the form of textual evidence from three short stories which are written by Maureen McHugh. In collecting the data, the writer uses close reading strategy of the three short stories especially parts which show the elements of analysis, namely the issue of women's power viewed from a feminist perspective. The data are selected in the form of monologue, dialogues, and the actions of characters.

## 1.8 Data Analysis

The present study uses qualitative descriptive approach and textual analysis technique. This approach is chosen because the data of this study are in the form of words. The present study describes the forms of power of women's characters in Maureen McHugh's collection book.

In analyzing the data, there are three steps involved. The first step is *identifying* forms of power in the three short stories. The second step is *categorizing* the forms of power according to Cixous' feminist perspective (1976). The final step involves *scrutinizing* these forms of power

based on Cixous' concept of women's representation in feminine writings to reveal the signification of the representation of the different forms of women's power in the stories.

## **1.9 Clarification of Key terms**

Some keywords in this paper as follows:

1. Short story: genre of prose, Medieval and early modern cycles of narratives are indirect models.(Klarer,1998)
2. Gender: a set of qualities that is defined or socially constructed. (Routledge, 1998 as cited in Simon Eliot and W.R. Owens, 1999)
3. Gender Roles : Shared expectations of behavior given one's gender (Stets and Burke, 2001)
4. Power: the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance (Max Weber, 1978)
5. Feminism: Social movement that seeks equal rights for women. (Wollstonecraft, 1792)
6. Perspectives: a view or vista or a mental view or outlook. Particular evaluation of something: a particular evaluation of a situation or facts, especially from one person's point of view (Fabian Linden, 2006)

## **1.10 Organizations of the Paper**

This paper consists of five chapters with specific function and organization elaborated as follows:

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION : This chapter consist of background of the study, the research questions, purposes of the research, the scope of the study, the objective of the study, the research methodology, the clarification of terms, and the organization of the paper.

CHAPTER II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: This chapter consist of relevant theories, ideas, and issues in which the principles and justifications of the research will be grounded. It will also provide findings of previous research and other supportive information relevant to the present research.

CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: This chapter will describe approaches and procedures, research designs, data collection and data analysis manifested in the research.

CHAPTER 4 FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS: This chapter will provide the result of data analysis.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS: This chapter will present conclusions drawn from the findings of the research. In addition, suggestions for future research will also be included in this chapter.