

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains background of the study, reason for choosing the topic, the scope of the study, research questions, aims of the study, the significant of the study, research methodology, clarification of terms, and the organization of the paper.

### 1.1. Background

Most portrayal of life from female point of view in literature is written by women authors (Lange, 2008, p. 1). However, male authors too have written fictions about women and some of them 'have attempted to see life from a woman's perspective' (ibid.). Feminism has been suspicious towards fictions written by male authors as they provide feminine idealization that, 'through the centuries, have served as propaganda to keep women in their place' (Williamson, 2001, p. 2). In her extended essay, Virginia Woolf argues that female characters featured in early literary works such as Sophocles', Shakespeare's, Tolstoy's, Flaubert's 'have burnt like beacons...lacking in personality and character' (Woolf, 1929), giving an impression that male authors has never been portraying female accurately and attempt to either make themselves feeling superior or make women are 'completely insignificant' (ibid.).

Some research regarding the way male authors portray women in their work of fiction have been conducted by Roger (1996), Miner (1997), and Ruunaniemi (2001). Roger (1996) conducted an analysis of how women are portrayed in Ian McEwan's fictions. From her study, it is concluded that, in some of McEwan's fictions, women are portrayed in a way that 'encapsulates the idea of Simone de Beauvoir that the construction of woman as incidental to man and only reference to man can be accepted by woman' (Roger, 1996, p. 11). It is due to the fact that during his adolescence, he had a little knowledge of girls since he was sent to all-boys boarding school. This research is similar to that of Ruunaniemi (2001) which is concerned with the portrayal of women in F. Scott Fitzgerald's fictions throughout

his literary career. The study shows that the portrayal of women in F. Scott Fitzgerald fictions changes throughout time. In his early fictions, Fitzgerald portrays women who aspire to a personal liberation and want to be free while in his later works Fitzgerald portrays 'women who actively work to reach that goal' (Ruunaniemi, 2001, p. 116). However, his later works shows some sensitiveness in the condition of women while portraying the yearning for independent in aspect such financial, education, and work field.

Miner (1997) has also conducted an analysis of how Andre Dubus wrote about women in his short stories. Miner discussed about women's voice and women's experience represented in the three works of Dubus – *Anna*, *Leslie in California*, and *Rose* – that focus intently on female characters. The study shows that in Dubus' stories the female characters are in an attempt to establish 'herself as herself' (ibid., p. 20; emphasis in the original), meaning that these women are portrayed as autonomous individual who seek her identity through the events she experiences.

One of works written by contemporary male author that focuses on the life of women and women's experience is *The Hours*. Published in 1998, *The Hours* is a Pulitzer Prize winning novel that tells about three different women from different historical periods whose stories are intertwined in the end of the novel. Written by a male American novelist, Michael Cunningham, each of the stories tells 'the experience of a particular woman during the course of one day' (Nogueira, 2009, p. 32). *The Hours* is opened with a prologue which later is followed by three narrative threads. They are Mrs. Woolf's section where ('fictional but entirely plausible' (Wood, 1998)) Virginia Woolf writes her *Mrs. Dalloway* while longing for London life in the end of World War I Richmond; Mrs. Brown section where a housewife Laura Brown prepares a party for her husband birthday in 1950s America; and Mrs. Dalloway section where Clarissa Vaughan, nicknamed Mrs. Dalloway, an editor living in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century New York is preparing a party for her AIDS-stricken friend. These women have a similarity: they are experiencing an existential anguish that makes them rethink and reconsider the choices they had made in their life. In the end of the novel, the readers are made known that those women are connected in a way they are writer, reader, and character of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.

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*Being Cunningham's Women: The Portrayal of Women in Michael Cunningham's The Hours*  
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Cunningham uses stream of consciousness narrative method in *The Hours*. Stream of consciousness method refers to the presentation of characters thoughts as they continue to act in the fiction. This method gives the reader insight of what is going on in characters' mind and what emotional process they feel (Humphrey, 1954; Barnes, n.d.; Lethbridge & Mildorf, 2004). The method is commonly used by modernist novelist such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and Dorothy Richardson. To the great extent, *The Hours* is actually based on Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and said as Cunningham's act of homage to the later novel (Schiff, 2004, p. 365).

Unlike the previous studies that have been mentioned above, this present study takes one work written by a male author as the object of the study while using the framework theory of Liberal Feminism as a guide to achieve the goal of this study. Thus, based on that theory, this study tries to reveal the depiction of women in Cunningham's *The Hours*.

## **1.2. Reason for Choosing the Topic**

*The Hours* is one of literary work that is rich in terms of themes and interesting because it is a single-day novel which, according to Schiff (2004, p. 363), 'provides a clear, manageable, and pre-determined time frame and structure'. Since it is a novel about women that is written by male author, a lot of issues regarding gender roles and experience can be investigated in the novel including how Michael Cunningham portrays women. Liberal Feminism is used as guidance to achieve the goal of the study.

### **1.3. Scope of the Study**

The study specifically analyzes how Michael Cunningham, as a male author, portrays women in the novel *The Hours*. This present study is based on the framework theory of Liberal Feminism.

### **1.4. Research Question**

This study tries to seek the answer to this following question:

1. How does Michael Cunningham, as a male author, portray women in the novel *The Hours*?

### **1.5. Aims of the Study**

This study attempts to investigate how Michael Cunningham, as a male author, portrays women in the novel *The Hours* based on Liberal Feminism.

### **1.6. Significance of the Study**

This study provides an illustration of how male author portrays women in the specific contexts she is subjected to, based on Liberal Feminist point of view. It is but a small contribution with other academic research regarding fictions in which women's story is written by male authors.

### **1.7. Research Methodology**

#### **1.7.1. Research Design**

This study is qualitative in nature since the data used for the study is in form of texts. Hancock (2002, p.2) suggests that the research using qualitative method 'focuses on description and interpretation that may lead to development of new concepts or theory' that help people understand the subject of the study. Furthermore, by using qualitative method coupled with textual analysis, the data collected are analyzed to meet the aim of the study and to develop the concept of how male author portrays women in his work of fiction.

### 1.7.2. Data Collection

The data is in the form of text so that in order to gather textual evidences to answer the research question, close-reading the novel multiple times is necessary. Secondary sources are gathered from other written materials such as previous research regarding women's portrayal in fictions, journals, and books related to the subject being investigated.

### 1.7.3. Data Analysis

The data acquired from the novel and other secondary sources are analysed as follows:

1. Choosing the primary source. In this study, the primary resource selected is a novel by Michael Cunningham entitled *The Hours* (New York: Picador USA, 1999).
2. Carefully close-reading the novel multiple times in order to get the best understanding of the text before delving into the analysis.
3. Highlighting the main characters' acts, thoughts, and speeches as the textual evidences;
4. Framing those textual evidences with Liberal Feminist theoretical framework to answer the research question;
5. Analysing the result of data collection;
6. Presenting the result by using descriptive method to describe how Michael Cunningham portrays women in the novel;
7. Drawing the conclusion of the study from the discussion of findings and making the suggestion for further researcher of related subject.

## 1.8. Clarification of Terms

### 1) Portrayal

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, portrayal is 'the act or process or an instance of portraying' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In this study, the term is used to see the depiction of women in the novel *The Hours* written by Michael Cunningham.

## 2) Liberal Feminism

Liberal Feminism is a form of feminism theory that focuses on women's ability to take actions and make their own choices in order to maintain equality and create a society where women and men can thrive equally (Tong, 2009, p. 13).

## 3) Stream of Consciousness

Stream of Consciousness is one of narrative methods that attempt to represent the thought of characters as they continue to act in the fiction. This method gives the reader insight of what is going on in characters' mind and what emotional process they feel (Humphrey, 1954; Barnes, n.d.; Lethbridge & Mildorf, 2004).

## 1.9. Organization of the Paper

The structure of this research consists of five chapters as follows:

### CHAPTER I

This chapter contains background of the study, reason for choosing the topic, the scope of the study, research questions, aims of the study, the significant of the study, research methodology, clarification of terms, and the organization of the paper.

### CHAPTER II

It consists of details on the theoretical frameworks employed in the study.

### CHAPTER III

This section contains the research methodology, describing the data used in the research and the methodology to be adopted.



#### CHAPTER IV

This chapter presents the result found in relation to both the research questions and existing knowledge.

#### CHAPTER V

This last chapter provides final reflection of the study and possible issue for further research.

