

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

There are two sexual divisions of human in this world: man and woman. In religious perspective in either Islam, Christianity or Jew, it is mentioned that woman is created from a man's rib. Naturally, what mostly differentiates between man and woman is their physical appearance. In an health online article, several differences between men and women are explained briefly (Heidi 1). An average man is taller and heavier than an average woman. Men have more bodily hair than women, especially on the chest and extremities. Women are more sensitive to sound than men. On average, girls begin puberty changing approximately two years before guys; female fertility decreases after age 35, ending with menopause, but men are capable of making children even when they are very old (Heidi 1).

Man and woman possess within them special traits and characteristics that result in their distinctive and specific functions and roles. The basic paradigm in viewing the role of man and woman is that a man is born as breadwinner in the family while a woman manages and takes care of the children and the household. This paradigm has brought its significant effects in the way man and woman perceives his or her 'self' as well as perceives each other. For example, some people do think that women should be at home taking care of the children and the household, and at the same time, they create the view that because of that very nature, women are not supposed to work because they are simply incapable of

doing it properly or that working outside domesticity does not suit their nature. The stereotypes above have resulted in various complex problems for both men and women, either in personal or social scopes. The problems probably get even worse for women since there are so many prejudices and stereotypes attached to them in the society.

According to dictionary reference, a girl (noun) is defined as a female child, from birth to full growth; a young, immature woman, especially formerly, an unmarried one. Meanwhile, the term “woman” (noun) refers to adult human beings who are biologically female; that is, capable of bearing offspring (Online). Both definitions show that the term “woman” represents a more mature figure than a “girl”. A woman is an adult female with mature way of thought, such as the consideration of commitment in life, to get married, bear and raise children, manage the household, and/or have and maintain career, and lead her life as a single fighter. A woman might experience various problems in her life. In personal scope, for example, a married woman might receive deep pressure from her husband as well as her surroundings, due to the concept of an ideal housewife. Not only that, sometimes a woman is also demanded to be as perfect as possible as both a housewife and a career woman. She has to work properly and manage the household well at the same time. In politics, women have also begun to pursue their rights to participate and vote. This is of course very different from what happened in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century when they had no rights to vote. These are just some of the problems experienced by women, but women can actually experience and get involved in a deeply rooting problem, which centered on internal matters they feel and think. The struggle to achieve

happiness and a meaningful life can also be the source of significant problem for a woman. Actually, men can also experience that, but due to women's higher level of sensitivity, women tend to get long drawn out in their internal problems, and it might cause them to suffer from confusion, anxiety, agitation, lost of self-esteem, and even depression, which may lead to taking actions, from leaving family, and/or committing suicide.

The above problems are portrayed in a novel entitled *The Hours*. Written by Michael Cunningham, this novel tells stories of three women's one-day-life, which is from morning to the night: Virginia Woolf in 1923, Laura Brown in 1950, and Clarissa Vaughan in the late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The three women live in three different generations: Virginia Woolf, a writer with good reputation in England who lives in London with her husband, Leonard. They have no child. Virginia is suffering from heavy headache that suddenly comes and goes. She seems to be dragged into her own novel's story and it makes her stress. The second female character is Laura Brown. She is married to Dan, once a popular boy in school and a war hero. Laura lives with Dan and their three-year old son, Richard, in Los Angeles during the year 1950. Laura is pregnant of her second child. She seems to be the portrayal of a woman who has everything in her life: a perfect family, with a caring husband, lovely son, and comfortable house. However, deep inside her heart, Laura feels something empty. She keeps wondering if she is happy and satisfied with all that she has. Meanwhile, the third female character is Clarissa Vaughan. She lives in New York in the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. She is unmarried, with a girlfriend named Sally and her own rebellious daughter. Clarissa makes her daily visits to Richard, her ex boyfriend who has

now become her best friend. Richard admires Clarissa; he thinks that Clarissa is more like Mrs. Dalloway, a major character from Virginia Woolf's novel. Richard himself made a novel and the character in the novel is just like Clarissa. Richard has been suffering from AIDS, and in the end of the novel, he commits suicide by jumping from the window on his apartment

The interesting and important point of the novel lies on the style of the speech that is details and flowing. The narrative is subjective. The voice comes from within the heads of the three major characters in their respective chapters, with occasional interjections from other characters. As the author, Cunningham tries to investigate inside women's thoughts. One important point to note is that as the author of the novel, Cunningham was influenced by the work of Virginia Woolf, namely *Mrs. Dalloway*. He wanted to rewrite the stories in the novel. Therefore, although it seems as a fiction story, the story of *The Hours* is actually the same reflection of Virginia Woolf's story. *The Hours* portrays conflicts experienced by those three female characters: how they think and feel about themselves, their life, their problems, and every myriads detail around them. They have to deal with what they think and feel inside while facing the fact that they are supposed to adapt with the social norms and expectation in the environment where they live.

According to Electric Literature, Michael Cunningham has written other notable works, such as *A Home at the End of the World* (1990) and *Flesh and Blood* (1995). His novel *A Home at the End of the World* was published in 1990 and was short-listed for several awards, such as the Irish Times International Fiction Prize. Cunningham's novel, *Flesh and Blood*, was published in 1995.

That year he won a Whiting Writer's Award. In *The Hours*, Cunningham explores themes common to his later works as well, such as traditional and extended family situations, the impact of AIDS, and the examination of gay culture within the larger society. *The Hours* has brought him high reputation for its many awards (Online)

As featured on Barnes and Nobel website, after growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio, Cunningham fled to the west coast to study literature at Stanford University, but later returned to the heartland, where he received his M.F.A. from the University of Iowa in 1980. Cunningham was awarded several grants toward his work, including a Michener Fellowship from the University of Iowa in 1982, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1988. *The Hours* is recreated from Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, which won both Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and was adapted into a major motion picture starring Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, and Nicole Kidman in December 2002

*The Hours* is unique because the story depicts the life of three women in three different generations with various problems and situations occurring in one single day. It is interesting how so many things can happen and be explored in a woman's single day. Furthermore, this story is written by a man who shows great sensitivity and efforts in understanding women's problems. *The Hours* is interesting to analyze since this novel contains the stories in human's life, particularly the problems experienced by women. It is interesting to examine how the three major female characters in the novel perceive themselves, their 'self', their life, and how they sacrifice their own happiness and choice in order to fulfill

the social norms and expectations. It can be seen from the novel that those women deal with various matters that result in their stress and anxiety. In the last part of the novel, the reader can see that the three major female characters in *The Hours* (Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughan) finally make their own decision as their resistance against social norms and expectations in their environment. This thesis is interested in discussing the problematic issues faced by those women in the forms of social norms and expectations around them and the way they negotiate or deal with them. Those two points are the major questions raised in this thesis that will be analyzed by using feminism theory.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Based on the background of the study, there are two questions that will be discussed in this study, which are:

1. What are the problematic issues faced by the three main female characters (Virginia, Laura and Clarissa) in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*?
2. How do the three main female characters in *The Hours* (Virginia, Laura and Clarissa) negotiate their problematic issues?

## **1.3. Objective of the Study**

Regarding to the statement of the problems, the aim of the analysis is to find out:

1. The problematic issues faced by the three main female characters (Virginia, Laura and Clarissa) in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*.

2. The negotiation performed by the three main female characters in *The Hours* (Virginia, Laura and Clarissa) in facing their problematic issues.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The use of Feminism theory in analyzing the novel is expected to bring more comprehension and insight to understand the novel entitled *The Hours*, especially on the matters concerning the pursuit of happiness, meaning of life, and self-identity, as contrasted with the social norms and prevailing in the women's lives. By analyzing what is actually experienced and suffered by Virginia, Laura and Clarissa as depicted in *The Hours*, it is hoped to provide a thorough understanding on such crucial matters, particularly for women at their age, times, and social backgrounds.

Further, this study is expected to appear as useful contribution for those who intend to study literature dealing with feminism issues, for students in general, as well as students of English Department of Airlangga University in particular.

#### **1.5. Scope and Limitation**

In order to gain a comprehensive analysis, a scope and limitation is applied in this study. The work to be analyzed is a novel by Michael Cunningham entitled *The Hours* (1998). The scope of this analysis covers going the various problems that happen in the life of three major female characters in the novel: Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughn. Virginia (who turns out to

commit suicide in the end of the novel) suffers from detachment from the city where she found her passion and her mental illness; Laura keeps asking and seeking about the meaning of her life as a housewife; while Clarissa deals with various complexities, from leading a life as a single-mother, having romance relationship with Sally, her girl friend, raising a daughter by herself, as well as taking care of her ex-lover, Richard. The analysis will be only emphasized on the three of them, which is supported by necessary details and information concerning their characters and characterization.

Scope and limitation will also be applied in theoretical framework. This study uses Feminism approach, particularly the existentialist feminism proposed Simone de Beauvoir which particularly focuses on the explanation of the pursuit of women's real happiness in contrast with the social norms and expectations around them. Some additional sources and information that show significant correlation with the text analyzed and the theory used are also used in this study in order to support some aspects of the analysis.

## **1.6. Theoretical Background**

Since the problems experienced by the three major female characters in the novel deal with the conflicts they experience in socializing and adapting with the social norms and expectations around them, the novel will be analyzed by using feminism theory, particularly the existentialist feminism proposed by Simone de Beauvoir. It is because there are problematic issues in the novel that arise from the imbalance between the values they have as an individual (a human being as well as a woman) and as a social being (a wife, mother, or part of the

society). Simone de Beauvoir explained that is quite difficult for a woman to be who she really is, and how it is later called as “The other”. Beauvoir also emphasized the point about human’s freedom as part as of his existentialism, which appears as part of the ultimatum in reaching existence (Arivia 275).

### **1.7. Method of the Study**

In doing the research, the novel entitled *The Hours* written by Michael Cunningham is used as the primary data. To support the analysis, library and online research are conducted in order to gather various supporting data. All data gathered is read and then analyzed to support the analysis.

Other method that will also be used is data collecting. All the data will be taken from the content of the novel. The data collecting is conducted by having a close reading, making the data classification and selecting the ones related to the problematic issues in the life of the three main female characters in facing the social norms in their life as portrayed in the novel. Later, the data related to the negotiation taken by the three major female characters in dealing with their problems is analyzed and explained in details. The analysis of this novel is put on the foundation of the feminism study on the related literature, including the critics’ opinions and the related theory of existentialist feminism proposed by Simone de Beauvoir.

### **1.8. Definition of Key Term**

1. Suicide : doing something against one’s own best interests: the act of doing something that seems contrary to your own best interests and seems

likely to lead to a disaster such as financial ruin or loss of position or reputation

2. Happiness : The state or condition of being or feeling happy; related with the sense of pleasure and satisfaction for meaningful things
3. Meaning (of life) : what life means: what a word, sign, or symbol in life means; what somebody wants to express in his or her life: what he or she intends to express, either in words or action; what something signifies or indicates; psychological or moral sense, purpose, or significance (Microsoft Encarta Dictionary, 2006)
4. Norms : standard patter of behavior; a required level of achievements (Microsoft Encarta Dictionary, 2006)
5. Woman : female adult; an adult female human being (Microsoft Encarta Dictionary, 2006)
7. Issues : subject of concern: something for discussion or of general concern; main subject: the central or most important topic in a discussion or debate (Microsoft Encarta Dictionary, 2006)