

# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Mario Klarer (2004) stated that literature is referred to as the entirety of written expression, with the restriction that not every written document can be categorized as literature in the more exact sense of the word. Literature must have “aesthetic” or “artistic” aspect to distinguish it from texts of everyday use such as telephone books, newspapers, legal documents, and scholarly writings.

Literature and society are related very tightly, because literature usually tells about conflicts in the society. People also learn about culture, life, sociology, and psychology when they read literature. Literature is made from an imagination and made to transfer that imagination to wide audiences. Authors pour down their life, experience, heart, feelings, dream, and fantasy into literary form so reader knows what inside author’s mind. Readers are connected to the author in some way when readers read a literary work.

Mario Klarer (2004) classified literature into three major genres; fiction, poetry, and drama. Fiction includes novel, novella, short story. Poetry is a literature that uses verse, rhyme, and meter and usually uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language. Both fiction and prose use written or spoken word as their primary means of expression, while drama combine the verbal with a

number of non-verbal or opticalvisual, including stage, scenery, shifting of scenes, facial expressions, gestures, make-up, props, and lighting.

One of the famous names in literature world is Sylvia Plath. Sylvia Plath, who lived in the era that women were still considered as second-class citizen compared to men, was a renowned poet in 1960s. Plath often chose death, victimization, patriarchy, the body, or motherhood as her poems' themes. Most of her poems reflected Plath's rough life from her early life until her death. She went through deep depression in her youth and committed suicide attempts many times. She took her own life at 30 years old because of her depression and her husband's affair. Plath only published one novel entitled "The Bell Jar" throughout her life. "The Bell Jar" is a semi-biographical novel inspired by Plath's struggle and depression in youth.

"The Bell Jar" tells a story from the perspective of young woman who lives in an era where women are explicitly told that happiness can only be achieved through marriage and an era where the society treats all deviance of with suspicion (Smith, 2008). The protagonist, Esther Greenwood, is a young woman who felt the patriarchal pressure from the society about how women should be. She had a dream to become a poet, but the plan to become poet did not go smoothly. People around her do not support her and expect her to get married instead of build a career. She also has a narrow minded boyfriend who always convinces Esther that men are superior to women. Her internal conflict causes depression and suicidal thought. She goes to psychiatrist and later moves to a state

mental hospital. She meets many kinds of people there and she struggles to find her identity.

Esther has different viewpoints of gender roles compared to women in her era. She does not want to be oppressed by men. She has a dream to become a writer which was rare for women in her era. Women in her era usually work as secretary or waitress on their youth and get married at young age. Women who get married and stay at home to take care of their children are considered as ideal women. If women do not get married, they will be considered as failure. Esther refuses to acknowledge the gender roles in her society. She refuses to learn stenography like all young women do, tries to throw away her virginity, and refuses to get married. She has done all of them as an attempt to reject women oppression in the society.

“The Bell Jar” reflects women oppression that happened before feminist movement emerged. Back in 1950s, women were considered second class citizen and lower than men in every aspect. Not many women were brave enough to stand up and express their opinion to oppose women oppression. Through this research, the writer wants to expose the perception about women oppression through the perspective of a character that lives in the era before feminism movement emerged.

The Bell Jar is semi-biographical novel that recount the experience of its author, Sylvia Plath. Plath’s opinions about women oppression and her struggles against it are poured down in “The Bell Jar”. The writer wants to expose the

opinion about women oppression from “The Bell Jar” to make the readers of this novel understand about women oppression and the importance to erase it from the society.

## **1.2 The Problem**

Based from the background, the writer focused to discuss on:

1. How does society perceive women and their roles in the society?
2. How does Esther Greenwood perceive women and their roles in the society?

## **1.3 The Objectives**

Related to the problems, this study intends to find out:

1. Society in Esther’s era perception of woman and their roles in the society.
2. Esther Greenwood perception of woman and their roles in the society.

## **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

Related to the topic of study, underlying theories for this study are:

1. Feminist Literary Criticism

DiYanni (2000, pg. 392) stated that feminist literary criticism examines the social and cultural aspects of literary works, especially about the role, position, and influence of women.

## 2. Feminist Existentialism

Feminist existentialism by Beauvoir (1949) believes that women are seen as objects and men are subjects in society's eyes. Women considered as secondary sex.

### **1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

To prevent the study from being too broad, the writer does not analyze all parts of the novel. The writer only focuses on the characters opinions and attitudes toward women, especially the main character's opinion about social norms and standard for women.

### **1.6 The Significance of the Study**

The writer hopes this study will help literature readers to understand more about perception of people who lived in the 1950s about women and their roles, so the readers can conclude the difference between how people perceive women in the past before feminism movement came up in 1960s and how people perceive women in the present.

### **1.7 Definition of Key-terms**

#### 1. Gender

According to Mary Holmes (2007 pg. 2) Gender refers to the social attributes to give differences between being feminine and being masculine.

2. Gender role

According to Amy M. Blackstone (2003) Gender roles refers to the different expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender

3. Society

According to Cambridge Dictionary society is a large group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done. All the people in a country, or in several similar countries, can be referred to as a society.

4. Perception

Perception is a belief or opinion, often held by many people and based on how things seem.

5. The Bell Jar

The Bell Jar is the only novel written by the American writer and poet Sylvia Plath. Originally published under the pseudonym "Victoria Lucas" in 1963, the novel is semi-autobiographical, with the names of places and people changed. The Bell Jar refers to the novel published by Harper Perennial, with the ISBN-13 of 9780060837020.