

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As human beings, people face many kinds of problems in their daily life and they can not avoid those problems when it come to them. Some people can handle the problems. They face the problems and get the their best solution. However, when the problems become more complex and complicated, they tend to choose the wrong way as their solution. One of the wrong ways is to commit suicide. Suicidal people think that committing suicide is the best decision to solve their problems. Suicidal people are also hopeless in facing the problems. Leenaars (2004:19) states, “The suicidal person, being hopeless and not wanting to tolerate the pain (suffering), desires to escape. Death is thought of as more desirable than life.”

Literature as a reflection of real life can depict also the problem of suicide. Howe (1979:2) states that literature is an imaginative writing which portray or deal with human existence. Besides suicide, there are many other themes such as love, sacrifice, hate, desire, hope, survival, suffering and death that are used by many great writers in their literary works. These themes are taken from the experiences of the writers themselves or from many events that happen in this world. Since literature deals with real life, reading literature can make people realize the importance of life and understand the meaning of life better than before. As Scholes (1978:xxv) points out, “..., literature enriches our lives

because it increases our capacities for understanding and communication.” Further he says, “It helps us to find meaning in our world and to express it and share it with others.” Because of these reasons, the writer of this thesis decides to analyze literary work in order to get the better insight of life.

From the three main types of literature (poetry, novel and drama), the writer chooses drama as the subject of her study because drama describes the reality of life better since it is meant to be performed on stage so that the audience can see what happens more vividly. This is supported by Kennedy (1991:952) who said that drama or play is designed to be presented by actors on stage. Since drama should be performed on the stage, drama itself should be made in the form of dialogues and monologues. Besides being performed on stage, drama can be read as other narrative works. This is supported by Howe (1979:649) who said that drama is one kind of literary works which depicts and illuminates the human experience imaginatively. In addition, drama is shorter and simpler than novel. This is supported by Little (1966:113) who states that drama is subject to a time limit (about two or three hours) and the plot of drama is generally more economical and more selective. Therefore, we will not spend much time in reading drama.

There are many playwrights in the literary world but Marsha Norman has impressed the writer because she is known as one of modern playwrights in her era who focuses on women’s role. Born in 1947 as the daughter of fundamentalist Methodist, Marsha Norman had a solitary childhood in Louisville, Kentucky. During the childhood, her mother did not allow her to play with other children and

watch television. This loneliness became somewhat like a blessing in disguise since it encouraged for her to be a writer. After her college graduation, she worked as a journalist for Louisville Times. Her first play entitled *Getting Out* was produced in 1977. *'Night, Mother*, her second play, was produced after she moved to New York City. It discusses about a suicidal woman. Besides that Barnett (1993:649), in her commentary, said that *'Night, Mother*' also tells about the heroism of the isolated individual and emphasizes on a kind of action that many women today regard as necessary if they want to escape from the assigned roles of housewife and sexual objects. *'Night, Mother* itself won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1983.

Marsha Norman's play that the writer chooses as the subject of the thesis is *'Night, Mother*. It tells about a woman who is obsessed by an idea to commit suicide. Jessie Cates, the main character in the play, lived together with her mother, Thelma. One evening, she calmly told her mother that she wanted to commit suicide with her father's gun. Her mother, of course, tried to prevent the suicide in many ways. Unfortunately, her efforts to change Jessie's mind were useless and Jessie maintained her determination to commit suicide. Jessie said that her decision to commit suicide had been thought for a long time. Therefore, she had prepared everything before she left. She made a list about things that should be finished before her death. Jessie prepared her mother for living alone, showed her where kitchen supplies and detergent were stored and explained how to have her favorite candies delivered, and advised her how to manage the police. Jessie even prepared her mother's dress that should be worn in the funeral and suggested

the food and wake her neighbors should bring. The dialogues between Jessie and her mother informed about the problems that Jessie had during her life. Jessie could not stand anymore that she had seizure, a kind of epilepsy disease, her husband deserted her, her son became a criminal and her mother treated her as a servant. Therefore she decided to commit suicide in order to get out from the situation that make her life suffered. It seemed that committing suicide was the only way that she wanted as a solution to solve her problems.

Normally committing suicide is not a solution for problems in life. Small and big problems come without warning. Whatever the problems, people should try to solve it with the best solution that they have. They cannot ignore their life by choosing the wrong way like committing suicide to end the problems. Life is too priceless to end by committing suicide. However, in '*Night, Mother*, the main character decides to commit suicide because she feels that she cannot face the problems. She does not care about her life anymore. But, reality of life is very complex. People cannot judge Jessie's decision on committing suicide on black and white basis. This leads the writer of this thesis to analyze Jessie Cates' personal problems that forced her to commit suicide in Marsha Norman's '*Night, Mother*.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Realizing that there are a lot of problems in Jessie Cates' life that lead her to commit suicide, the writer is interested in finding the answer of the following question:

What kinds of personal problems did Jessie Cates face before her suicide?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the problem that is mentioned above, this thesis aims at finding out and analyzing Jessie Cates' personal problems that lead her to commit suicide in *'Night, Mother'*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This thesis discusses a new theme of literary of analysis in English Department of Teacher Training and Pedagogy Widya Mandala University since it firstly analyzes a suicidal behavior which is found in a play entitled *'Night, Mother'*. In addition, Marsha Norman who is considered as a contemporary playwright (of the 80s) so that this thesis discusses relatively 'new' dramas. Therefore, the writer hopes that the reader, especially the students of Widya Mandala Catholic University will get some advantages by reading this thesis. The writer wishes that her study would give them a broader knowledge about drama and its playwright which exist in 1980s. It is also hoped that this thesis will facilitate them in understanding drama better than before. Besides that, the thesis hopefully can make the reader realize that life is priceless. Every problem in life

has each solution and people can choose the best decision without endangering themselves like committing suicide.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

1. A play is a special literary work which has plot, character and dialogue of the character (Scholes and silversam, 1978:73).
2. Character is an author representation of human being, especially that inner quality that determines how an individual reacts to various conditions or attempts to shape his or her environment (Little, 1966:66).
3. Characterization is the means by which the writer creates the sum of traits, thought and action which, taken together, constitute a character (Ferguson, 1949:785).
4. Plot is the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed (Perrine, 1966:58).
5. Depression is considered as a form of mental disorder or mental illness with certain symptoms such as hopelessness or despair, pessimistic thought and suicidal thought or action (Stoppard, 2000:7).
6. Suicide is a conscious act of self-induced annihilation, best understood as a multidimensional malaise in a needful individual who defines an issue for which the suicide is perceived as the best solution (Schneidman in Leenaars, 2004:5).

1.6 Scope and Limitation

Realizing that there are many aspects and elements in drama, the writer decides to limit her analysis by focusing only on the conflicts that appear in drama. The writer especially focuses on the personal problems faced by Jessie Cates.

1.7 The Organization of the Thesis

In this thesis, there are five chapters. In chapter I, the writer presents the background of the study, the research problem, the objective of the study, the significance of the study, the definition of a key terms, the scope and limitation and the organization of the thesis. In next chapter related to literature review, she presents some related theory of play and its element, psychoanalysis theory and the previous study. Chapter III will discuss the methodology used in this study. The discussion of the finding will be presented in chapter IV. Finally, in chapter V, the conclusion, the writer will conclude the whole discussion from the previous chapters.