

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is going to discuss background of the study which talks about reasons in choosing the topic that later will be analyzed. That is why; it is also include statement of the problems and objectives of the study. And to make it easier to do analysis, it is include scope and limitation of the study. In this chapter also discusses significance of the study which is believe this research can give some advantages to the readers.

1.1. Background of the study

Gender is the social difference between males' and females' roles or men' and women's personalities (Connell, 2002:33). It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. One of the most arguable and observable social issue is gender inequality which is based on feminism thoughts.

Gender inequality affects women in the issue of objectification. McKinnon (1987) argues that gender inequality causes women to be seen as "the other self". It means that she becomes the object of pleasure by men. Gender inequality as one of the concern of feminist critics becomes one of the popular issue. Since feminist critics generally comes to criticize the cultural mind-set in men and women that perpetuated sexual inequality (Berry, 2002). According to Hannam (2007),

feminism is an understand as that arises when women demanded to get equal rights as men. The term was used in the political debate in France in the late of 19th century where the 18th century can be called as starting point in the history of feminism

The problem of gender inequality is the problem of human right that appears in the surface in which woman's position in under man. Here men act as super ordinate while women as subordinate. It caused different treatment, opportunity, and role right between men and women in social life. There are many forms related to the gender inequality issue, one of them is *male gaze*.

The term *male gaze* was first popularized by Laura Mulvey, a film critic who concerns on feminism in 1975 through her essay entitled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". It refers to the act of depicting women and the world, in the visual arts and literature from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that presents and represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the heterosexual male viewers (Mulvey, 1989). Through her essay, Mulvey tries to give understanding on women portraits in the scenes who have the role in fulfilling the men's need as the object of *male gaze* (Hollows, 2010:61).

For many years, the issues related to women objectifications still exist and become the concern for feminists to criticize. In real life, they criticize advertising and image publicity as well as erotica which is used to erotize a woman's body in a way that turns out to be an object of mere *male gaze* (Wells, 2015:178). The apparent objectification of women's representation in the media is caused by male domination through media technology. The representation of women in the media

is as an object not as a human entity as a whole. This happens in many contexts; advertising and films including the world of photography, through the media of male sexual fantasies satisfied with the depiction of women who are often in vulnerable situations and easily incapacitated and asked to appear naked or semi-nude which is shaped by the form of gender inequality.

Not only in cinemas, but also in many literary works such as poetry, dramas, essays and novels, the issue still become a popular theme of many writers. According to Pradopo (1994) the literary work is as the picture of the world and human life, the main criteria that is putted on the literary work is “truth”, or everything that wants to be pictured by the author. It is a description of human experience that has dimensions of personal and social as well as the knowledge of humanity that is parallel to the form of life itself (Lefevere, 1985).

Novel, as one of the literary works is very popular because it has strong influence to interest society. It is written based on our society daily a life and it is also written based on our imagination. It has complex story because it has long written story different from short stories which is usually written with narration and description. Altenbernd and Lewis (1966) state that fiction can be interpreted as imaginative narrative prose, but story does commonly make sense and contains the truth which dramatizes humans interactions. Novel can take the readers to a certain situation, place or period that occur in the story of the novel. At the end of the novel, the readers can discover meaning, messages or values which are revealed in the novel. Responding to literature stories, poems, plays, and Essay,

we read literature to find out the beauty of words of great writers. Literature teach us the truth about our live and we can learn good values from it (Mercier, 2005)

In the novel and other literary works, the most important element is character. According to Abrams, characters are people who appear in a work of narrative or drama, which the reader is interpreted to have a certain moral quality and tendency as express through speech and action performed. From the characters, the readers can see the expression and attitudes being felt in the story and also from the characters the event of the story can be involved. The characters in the novel play important role to build an object and psychologically represent the writer to give the message to the readers through the characters. The characters in the novel can see through their way of talking and their behavior shown in the novel. Characters in novel are judged to be psychologically an imitation of human in real life. The characters have its own way of dealing with their life according to every problem that occurs in the story.

One of the literary works that appearing theme of the *male gaze* is *The Vegetarian*, a famous novel by the Korean woman writer, Han Kang. It tells the story a young, obedient, submissive married woman, Yeong-hye becomes a vegetarian in the wake of a dream involving meat and a pool of blood on which a face is reflected. This association, albeit unconscious, between meat and violence, coupled with a number of childhood memories revolving around cruelty to animals, conspire to lead her to gradually to reject eating meat and fish and eventually most types of food, as a visceral rejection of her husband, her father and cultural conventions that dictate women's behavior, especially in strongly

patriarchal societies like South Korea, when the author comes from, which are severely repressive of women. Symptomatic of Yeong-hye gradual retreat into herself is the almost total absence of her voice, only heard very intermittently. The story is told through the narratorial voice of her husband, her brother-in-law, and later her sister, but the predominant lens of the narrative is a male one, indicative of the *male gaze*.

The novel was first published in 2007 which reached international critical acclamations and many prestigious awards including *Man Booker International Prize* in 2016 after being translated into English by Deborah Smith a year before. It was also adopted and filmed on 2008, directed by Lim Woo-Seong with the same title. *The vegetarian* is divided into three parts. The individual parts were originally published in three different Korean literary journals in 2004 and 2005. The second part of the novel, *Mongolian Mark* was awarded the prestigious Yi Sang Literary Award in 2005 (Montgomery, 2013). The three parts was published as a full novel in 2007. *The vegetarian* is the first of Han's book that translated into English in 2015 and followed by *Human Acts* (2016), and *The White Book* (2018).

In conducting this study, this current study is inspired by some study that did the study of *male gaze* in literature. They are: "Male Gaze in Movie the Handmaiden" by Ilham Mubaraok, a student of Diponegoro University (2013). It concerns to describe the discourse of body, sexuality, and character development of lesbian women in the movie. The second entitled "The Holy Male Gaze in Martin Ling's "Muhammad: His Life Based on The Earliest Sources Novel" by

Arina Hasbana, a student of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta (2019). The focus of this study is to find how the character of Aisha is narrated by the male author in the story. The result concludes that the *male gaze* is powerful and Aisha is powerless. The last is an essay entitled “We Felt the Imprisonment of Being a Girl: Uncanny Male Gaze in The Virgin Suicides” by Sarah Grace Fiore from the University of Rhode Island. It focuses to illustrate the way in which the uncanny experience functions to reveal latent fantasies and even deeper fears of the male narrators in question.

Based on the reasons above, the researcher is interested in conducting this study which is entitled “Male Gaze in Han Kang’s Novel *The Vegetarian*”. By using the theory of *male gaze* from Laura Mulvey and Rachel Calogero and some supporting related theories, this study tries to find out the depictions of the *male gaze* and its effect towards the main character in the novel.

Further, the research needs to know what kind of *male gaze* are experienced by Yeong-hye, then, analyzing the effects of male gaze towards her. The first focus is *male gaze*. Male gaze itself states may have several forms like *scopophilia* and *voyeurism* which will be explained more detail in chapter two. The second focus in this research is the research is needed to know the effects of male gaze towards the main character in the novel. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), *male gaze* leads to increase self-objectification which leads to negative subjective experiences, for example: anxiety, delusion, and hallucination which risk towards one’s mental health such as eating disorder, depression, and sexual dysfunction.

This research appearing male gaze as the main focus because it is still relevant with the condition of the society nowadays, where men still dominant in many aspect of life. Hopefully, it can give better understanding about one of the concern of feminist critics, male gaze, since the practice can bring several bad effects toward women as the victim. Thus, we can respect women more as women should be not only as object.

1.2 Statement of the problem

1. How is the *male gaze* depicted in Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian*?
2. What is the effect of *male gaze* towards Yeong-hye in Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian*?

1.3 Objective of the study

1. To find out the depiction of *male gaze* in Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian*.
2. To find out the effect of *male gaze* towards Yeong-hye in Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian*.

1.4 Scope and limitation

The Vegetarian is a novel which is rich in themes to explore. So, to avoid a wide and long discussion, limitation is needed. This study mainly concentrates on the depiction of *male gaze* and its effects from the male characters towards the main female character, Yeong-hye.

1.5 Significance of the study

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the development of literary criticism in *The Vegetarian*, especially the *male gaze* issue as a new perspective in the science of exploring novels. It also gives references in literary work especially in term of feminism, gender inequality and male gaze or the objectification of women that are mentioned in the novel.

Practically, this study is suggested to persuade readers to think critically about *male gaze*. It also helps readers to understand about *male gaze* as one of a feminism issue. Furthermore, it is also important for students to deepen and broaden their understanding on *male gaze*. Finally, this study is expected to become a source of information for others who are interested in doing a relevant study.

